

Kelston of Kells



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Anderson



Adam Gordon.



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KELSTON OF KELS

TO MY MOTHER

KELSTON OF KELLS

BY

H. M. ANDERSON

AUTHOR OF 'DOMENICO'

"The earth is round, the heart of man is three-cornered, therefore this cannot be filled by that."

From a letter of Mr JAMES RENWICK

THIRD IMPRESSION

William Blackwood and Sons Ltd.
Edinburgh and London

1927

PART I

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

AT the east end of the Luckenbooths a small crowd had gathered to watch the Lords and Bishops as they came from the Parliament House, women and college lads with a sprinkling of countrymen, the townsmen for the most part holding aloof, for there were apt to be sparks flying in Edinburgh, as elsewhere, where such tinder boxes as the Bishops were concerned, and nobody knew where one might alight; still a few, bolder than the rest, loitered to raise a cheer for Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh who was said to have shown much courage in opposing the suggested Union.

"Yon's a terrible ugly man," a woman said, as the Commissioner's great red head showed at the window of his coach, yet she curtsied as low as any as his eyes glowered over the crowd; my Lord Lauderdale was still the centre of many hopes in the Scotland of 1669, though this talk of union betwixt the countries was vastly unpopular.

"Is it true they have made the King abune God in this land?" another woman asked in awed tones, catching at the sleeve of a country member as he hurried past, but he shook her off with a "Tush! woman, you speak of matters too high for you," and brought indignant protest from the crowd.

"There is St Andrews," said a student, pointing out the Archbishop to a fellow more newly joined.

"He is fleyed to be seen in the streets since he was shot at last year," said another, and spat surreptitiously.

A young cleric coming up the High Street bowed profoundly as the Archbishop's coach lumbered past,

following the Commissioner's to Holyrood, but his Grace sat deep among his cushions and looked not to left or right.

"He is afraid you have a pistol under your cassock," said a boy, breaking from the crowd and linking an arm in that of the clergyman. "Are they going to join us to England, think you?" And without waiting for a reply, "Is it true they have given you the theology chair in Glasgow? and oh, Gib! have you heard about Ann?"

Mr Gilbert Burnet turned a handsome, good-natured face to the impetuous questioner, and answered with calm deliberation, taking each question in turn and pausing to comment on the first. "I do not think union will come just yet, but I think folk are foolish to grow hot against it with little or no thought. This Supremacy Act seems to me the more dangerous seeing it cannot but raise further strife in the West. Yes, Walter, they have greatly honoured me in Glasgow. Lastly, I am too newly returned from London to have heard aught of Ann. She and your mother are, I trust, well? Indeed, I was on my way to enquire for them even now."

"Ann is going to Court," said the boy; and this time he succeeded in disturbing his companion's calm. Mr Burnet stopped, his smile fading as he surveyed Walter, half suspicious of jest.

"Ann, our little Ann, to Court?"

"She is sixteen. Lord! Gib, I will be fourteen myself come Saturday, sure she is old enough to go." Then his face clouded and he lowered his voice confidentially, speaking with an air of worldly wisdom that matched oddly with his youth. "Between you and me, I'd as lief she were not going neither. There be queer tales told at school of the doings down there in the South; but you know what my mother is when her mind is made up, and besides, the Duchess of York has sent for her."

They had walked on, and now stopped before a high land of houses. Walter pushed open the door of the turnpike stair and invited the other to enter.

"Best come up and hear it all from themselves," he said. "There is a mighty fuss going on I can tell you, mantua-makers, haberdashers, dancing masters and Lord knows what; but they will want to hear about Glasgow. Maybe they will send me to you now, my mother did speak of it when Mr Leighton first told her you might get the chair." And as Mr Burnet was willing enough to follow him, he led the way up.

In answer to Walter's energetic tirling of the pin outside, a door on the third floor was opened by an old man-servant, who, at the boy's direction, ushered Mr Burnet into her ladyship's presence, while Walter himself climbed an inner stair and entered the room above.

At the window a girl knelt on a stool looking out, she had thrown open the casement and the snell air blew in, bringing a glow to her cheeks and lifting the curls on her forehead. Below her thronged the chimney-pots of the houses lower down the close, which dropped steeply to the Nor' Loch; between the tallest of them the girl could see the Lang Gait and the open country beyond, the shore where the fisher folk lived, and the seaport town of Leith with its tall ships. The Forth was blue to-day and the coast-line clear; away to the west the Highland hills shimmered, romantic and mysterious. But it was on the ships rather than on the hills that Ann Kennedy's thoughts fixed themselves to-day. 'Twas the ships brought the merchandise and news of the great world, 'twas the ships led to adventure. Maybe, if her mother so decided, it would be one of these same tall ships would carry her forth upon her own first venture into life.

"It is wondrous chill, Ann, with that window ajar," the boy said petulantly. She turned, drawing the casement to with a laugh. "'Tis you should have been the girl, Wat, and I the boy," she said, and on the instant regretted her words, for the tears rose in his eyes, though he blinked them away at once. "Captain Spalding, him that brought the silk from Holland last

year, has offered to carry me to London in one of his brigs," she said hastily to cover her mistake. "Seems his wife is going and could care for me. Oh, Walter! do you not wish you were going to Court? I would you were coming with me, for indeed I know not what I am to do without you."

"I would rather be going to Pulquhanity," he said. "I do not love cities."

She wondered, half amused, why, with his love of moorlands, he showed himself so fearful of cold air, but for once she kept her thought from her tongue. Walter often puzzled her.

He came near now, standing beside the stool and looking past her to the sea.

"I would you were not going to Court," he said. Then, as she looked her astonishment, "The folk were talking as I came from the school. This new Act pleaseth none, and many lewd things are said anent the King."

She jumped down and shook him gently by the shoulder. "Shame upon you for listening, disloyal schoolboy cackling. Faugh!" Then her annoyance gave way, he looked so small and frail and spoke so fatherly.

"Is it not strange to think that her Grace of York was once a girl like me, and glad to have our mother speak to her parents for her when the Princess of Orange would have her as a maid of honour and they wished it not; to think she held me in her arms and begged that I should be called by her name; stranger still, that after all those years she should remember and send for me? What say you, perhaps I too shall marry a king's son and become a princess!" She pirouetted on one foot and dropped him a curtsy, but could not shake his solemnity.

"I would not have you marry a bastard, and there is no other of royal blood," he said, and as she only laughed at his literalness, he added sulkily, "Gib Burnet is of a mind with me about Court; he did not say so but I could read it in his face."

"Mr Burnet? Is he returned? Oh, Wat! he is

but just come from London ; is he here ? Why did you not tell me ? ” And “ I am glad I put on my new gown,” she thought, remembering the Court ladies.

Meanwhile, Mr Burnet, sitting opposite to Lady Kennedy in the wainscotted parlour, listened doubtfully to his old friend’s tale of her daughter’s advancement.

“ Mistress Hyde was a good friend to me when we were all exiles at Breda, and her daughter (Nan as we called her then) was our little Ann’s godmother ; but since the blessed Restoration and her marriage with his Royal Highness, our paths have lain wide apart, and I was more than astonished when her Grace wrote to remind me of an old promise, laughingly made, that she would take Ann to her own care when she was grown. It is, of course, a high honour and not to be lightly refused, the more so that my own health makes it impossible for me to face the difficulties and fatigue of presenting Ann to the King, for whom her father suffered so much.”

Lady Kennedy, sitting very straight in her high-backed chair, looked at the young man before her with a slight frown. Men, she thought irritably, were slow and stupid creatures, but she did not see why this one, from whom she expected both help and sympathy, should sit silent instead of offering her the advice she needed. His father had been a friend of her husband’s, and his brother, though she disapproved his Presbyterian sentiments, was her physician. Gilbert, in his early struggles with his family (for he alone had conformed to Episcopacy) had always found in her a friend and counsellor ; and it was annoying, therefore, that instead of advising her as to modes of travel and other necessities, he should hum and haw, harp on Ann’s extreme youthfulness, forgetful of her sixteen years, and otherwise put difficulties in her path.

He saw her displeasure and tried to appease it.

“ Ann has always seemed a child for her age, my lady, and very innocent, and the Court is—is much changed since you knew it in the far-off days of the

late King." He stopped, his handsome face growing a shade pinker; tact was never one of Mr Gilbert Burnet's strong points, but even he realised that to remind a lady that her own youth is almost matter of history, is not the best way of propitiating her. Perhaps the blush was becoming and his distress sufficient punishment, or Lady Kennedy was sufficiently assured that her good looks had outstayed the passing years, for she only laughed.

"Yes," she said, "I dare say things have not stood still since, in the company of my aunt, Mrs Kelston, I kissed the hand of the Blessed Martyr."

"Mrs Kelston?" questioned Gilbert, glad to change the subject, "I do not seem to remember your speaking of this aunt and yet the name is familiar."

"My mother's sister, a Douglas of Morton, married Simon Kelston of Kells." Lady Kennedy could not resist the pleasant byroads of genealogy. "I was much at Kells House as a young girl, but soon after the journey of which I spoke my father and Mr Kelston quarrelled, as so many quarrelled in these days, Mr Kelston upholding the Covenant, even to the drawing of swords against the Lord's anointed, a disgrace to his house and lineage which my father could ill abide, and from that time all relationship was broken off. I heard later that my cousin, John Kelston, was married and that he had died at Worcester, thereby, I trust, redeeming his father's backsliding; but the name is indeed like the raising of a curtain on some old picture of youth."

Lady Kennedy sighed; but Mr Burnet was greatly excited.

"Truly, a strange coincidence," he exclaimed, all his chagrin vanishing in the joy of imparting information, "for it must have been a son of this same John, a certain Mr Simon Kelston, gentleman, I think, of the bedchamber, whom I met but now at his Majesty's Court."

"John's son? John's son at Court, this is news indeed, a cousin for Ann at Whitehall."

"A cousin at Whitehall? Sure, my lady, that is pleasant news indeed."

The rumbling of a cart over the cobbles of High Street had hid the sound of the opening door, and neither of the speakers were aware of Ann's entrance until the gay young voice broke in upon their talk. She stood in the doorway, smiling a little shyly from one to the other, a slim childish figure in a simple old-fashioned gown, for all she thought it so fine, her brown curls framing a face whose chief attraction was its youthful freshness, and a certain charm which had little to do with feature or contour.

"Practising for Court," she said, as she swept Mr Burnet a curtsey, then with another to her mother.

"Is it permitted, my lady, to hear more of this new cousin?"

"It is not permitted to obtrude oneself unasked into the conversation of others," Lady Kennedy said severely. "If you must do so, it would be more seemly to ask the good Mr Burnet for his blessing, and wish him well on the honour so lately bestowed upon him."

The girl laughed, unabashed. "Why, yes, they have made you a reverend professor, Gib? What will the good folk of Salton do without you? And, oh, I hope you will not show too great severity to the youth under your reverence's care." She dropped him a second curtsey and offered him her cheek.

"And you are going to be a fine court lady?" he asked when he had saluted it. Then, as for a moment it seemed to him that a look of fear showed in her face, "You wish to go?"

"Truly," she answered him, "I count the days to be gone, yet there are moments when London seems very far off and the Court over grand for a humble country lass, and it is at such a time that the thought of one there who is mine own cousin is not unpleasant." She looked questioningly, her head a little on one side, and Lady Kennedy laughed.

"My daughter is a spoilt bairn, Gilbert. Excuse

her impertinence and tell us something of my cousin John his son."

Mr Burnet, never averse from relating news, gladly acquiesced; but first, because he liked a tale to be orderly, he must needs give them an account of how, in company with that saintly and much to be admired gentleman, Mr Leighton, Bishop of Dunblane, he had had the honour of a private audience with the King who had listened with patience, if not with much sympathy, to the Bishop's scheme of accommodation with the Presbyterians.

It was not difficult to see that throughout this recital Lady Kennedy's sympathy was entirely with the King, but her daughter's view of the matter was less easy to gauge.

"I did not at first take much notice," continued Mr Burnet, "of a young gentleman who sat on a stool by the fire, seeming more taken up with the dogs (of which His Majesty has many) than with the serious and godly discourse upon which we were engaged, until of a sudden the King, leaning back, called over his shoulder, 'Simon, here be matters more to your taste than mine, seeing it is for your miserable Church that the good Bishop pleads so ably,' whereupon Mr Kelston came and stood leaning against the King's chair with a dog held beneath his chin."

"What is he like?" cried Ann eagerly, but her mother held up a silencing finger.

"Surely this young man cannot be a Presbyterian and at the same time of the bedchamber?" she asked.

"It seems," said Mr Burnet, warming to his tale, "that Mr Kelston's father who, as you know, was killed at Worcester, died, as the King himself was pleased to relate to us, in circumstances directly relating to his Majesty's own safety, and at his death besought the King to have his child brought up a Presbyterian. 'And though,' said His Majesty, 'there be many who call me ungrateful, I do not forget those who served me in evil days, and while I live the

Penderels shall have their Mass and Simon here his Covenant.' 'In the keeping of which you, sir, and this good Bishop have shown me so excellent an example,' says the young man, I fear me a trifle drily. Yet in the end I cannot but think it was owing to a jest of Mr Kelston's rather than to our own eloquence that we owed any small measure of success we may have attained."

"I regret," said Lady Kennedy stiffly, "that you bring me such a poor account of our cousin. He seems to have all the faults of his grandfather, with an added lightness and lack of reverence, even for the King, his master."

"Nay, nay, my lady," Burnet said hastily, "I would ask you not to judge too hardly from what I have said. There is indeed a lightness about the whole Court which, to my mind, is greatly to be deplored, but it must be owned that the King does nothing to discourage it. Mr Kelston has a good name with such excellent gentlemen as Sir Robert Murray and Mr Evelyn, both of whom I have heard speak of him with affection. He has been, it is said, with the King since he was a child, and is treated by him with unusual condescension and favour."

"The more reason he should not abuse his privileges," said Lady Kennedy who seldom changed an opinion; but Ann, though she said nothing, was by no means sure that she disliked the portrait painted for her by the clergyman's ready tongue.

To tell the truth too, Mistress Ann knew more of her cousin of Kells, or of his house at any rate, than her mother imagined. Lady Kennedy, almost an invalid, went little abroad, but Ann and Walter had often ridden from Pulquhanity to the old House of Kells, drawn thither, in part, by the beauty of its surroundings, but drawn also by the strange tales told of its owner, spirited away in childhood to far countries and never seen again. Now it seemed she herself was to see him, and the thought was full of excitement.

CHAPTER II

ANN awoke one morning three weeks after her coming to St James's and lay looking out between the curtains of her bed. Her bedfellow, Mistress Blagge, was already arisen and deeply engaged in her morning devotions. A gentle, gracious girl this Mistress Blagge, some two years older than Ann, who had been put into her charge by her Grace of York, to be instructed in her duties and helped through the first strangeness of her new life.

There had been much to learn. There had been also an entire new wardrobe to be ordered and fitted, for the Duchess had merely smiled and shaken her head over the dresses which Ann and her mother had packed with so much pride. Mistress Blagge had been very kind about this, as about all else, and last night had consummated her efforts and Ann had been taken for the first time to Whitehall in attendance upon her mistress. The Duchess in her haughty way had been gracious to the girl; the King himself had noticed her, and the other maids had teased her good-naturedly upon her success; and yet, as Ann lay there between dreaming and waking, tears rose suddenly, almost blinding her, and she wished with a passion of home-sickness that she was home, in her mother's room in the old High Street house or at Pulquhanity; not that she was really unhappy, but it was so different, so very different, from anything she had expected.

London itself; how often in the days before her journey she had pictured this wonderful city, to find it now in ashes, naught to be seen but blackened chimney-stacks and builders' scaffolding, with but a few narrow, filthy lanes to show what once had been; and Whitehall, with a name which seemed to picture stateliness and shimmering marble against the blue waters of the Thames, was in reality but a village of ill-assorted tenements with a public roadway running through their midst, and only the noble Banqueting

Hall to show that it was indeed the palace of a king. Yet, disappointing though her surroundings undoubtedly were, it was a difference more inward and subtle that came between her dreams and their realisation and brought tears to Ann's eyes as she looked back this morning at her three weeks' experience of Court. What had she expected? she asked herself, and hardly knew.

When her mother had talked, as she loved to do, of her visit to the stately court of the Martyr, there had seldom lacked some one to remark on the difference wrought by the Restoration. Mrs Scott of Roslynlea who lived in the flat above and was third cousin to the Duchess of Buccleuch, had been to London at the time of the latter's marriage with the Duke of Monmouth and had much to say of the Court with its masques and dances, its music and laughter. Gaiety? Yes, that was it. Gaiety to Ann had always meant something joyous, something that filled the heart with clean, irresistible laughter, bubbling over like the water of a mountain spring because one was happy; at Whitehall the night before there had been laughter, but not of the kind which invites to join its merriment, but rather the laughter of scorn, the stinging mirth which must needs have a victim.

It had been a brilliant scene this first sight of the Court, a vision of bright lights and rich dresses, beautiful women and handsome men, a background of music to which no one listened, and the noise of many voices; but of gaiety, as Ann knew it, there had been strangely little. One incident stood out in that medley of sharp-tongued wit and dreary laughter. A voice behind her had spoken suddenly, hardly troubling to lower its tone:

"Charles looks perturbed to-night."

"Somebody has been worrying him about Albe-marle's funeral," a second voice answered with a laugh. "He promised young Chris to see to it and then forgot, so the Duke lies unburied for lack of black velvet to hang in his chamber."

"Tch! More like 'the Lady' is nagging him for a Duchy," said the first speaker. "Who'd be a king?"

Following their look, Ann had had her first view of the Majesty of England. He had come in quietly, so quietly that few had noticed him, and he now lounged lazily on a low settle, his long legs stretched before him. Under his plumed hat his face showed dark and saturnine, and he appeared to take little notice of the conversation with which a handsome woman, leaning towards him, endeavoured to keep him amused. As Ann gazed upon him, at once admiring and repelled, he looked up and met her eyes. Instantly he was on his feet, and in a stride, or so it seemed to the girl, he was at her side. Far too terrified to move, she stood transfixed, her manners forgotten, while the King, his finger beneath her chin, lifted her face and looked at her.

"A new face, and from the country, I'll be bound," he said, with a smile that lit his own dark countenance and made it instantly attractive.

Ann's presence of mind came back, and she sank to the floor in the deepest curtsey she could attain.

"From Scotland, sire, your own country," she murmured proudly.

He made a wry face. "Oddsfish! a dreary one," he said. But with that the Duchess came bustling up. "Ann Kennedy, sir, by your permission, the latest appointed of my maids. Have I the honour to present her? Her father, Sir Walter, died in exile at Breda."

"And her mother hath not importuned me for recompense? Faith! We owe the daughter gratitude for that," the King said with a laugh, and lightly kissing the upturned face, he passed on with a word of welcome, to lean for a few minutes over the Queen's chair and enquire about the fortune of her play, thereby putting her into the seventh heaven of delight.

"Lord! does he still hope for an heir?" the voice behind Ann had drawled.

After that there had been many to take notice of her, for where the King looks, be it but for a moment, who knows what favour may follow; and, though she

knew it not, her possibilities and chances were discussed long after she herself was abed and asleep. Castlemaine, 'the Lady' as she was called, was known to be losing favour, with no one actually at Court to take her place. Ann would have been horrified indeed had she guessed what heights—or depths—the King's chance word had opened before her. Well for her that the verdict of the experts was against her. "Not handsome enough for Charles, too well-favoured for James," Rochester had summed her up with a shrug.

But Ann knew nothing of this. She had listened with a docility quite unlike her laughter-loving self to the advice of gentle Mistress Blagge, "that, when they went into the withdrawing room, it was well to consider their calling, that being to entertain the ladies and not to talk foolishly to the men, more especially not to the King."

That was strange too, when one thought of it; different again from all her preconceived notions of royalty. Ann sat up and looked again at Margaret Blagge. Of all the strange contradictions of this Court surely one of the strangest was this pure-souled, saintly girl, reared almost from her birth in an atmosphere of lurking evil and sneering, sensual paganism, yet as untouched by it as any Christian maiden in the palace of Nero. She had risen from her knees, but still stood with hands clasped and eyes fixed as in some mystic contemplation.

Ann sighed, and the thousand questions died upon her lips. She was, she felt sadly, as far removed from Mistress Blagge as from the painted, dissolute women of last night, and she so much wanted a comrade. A sudden thought came to her.

"Mistress Blagge," she said, "do you know aught of Mr Simon Kelston of Kells?"

Mistress Blagge came back to earth with a slight start.

"Mr Kelston? Why, yes, I have known Simon Kelston since I was a child. Was he not at Court last night? No, I remember. Then he will be away

on some errand for the King, he is often away, for the King trusts him much."

"He is my cousin," said Ann, "but I have never seen him. Tell me about my kinsman, I pray you."

"He was page to the young Duke of Gloucester, I believe, when first he came to France after his father's death," Mistress Blagge said in her gentle, deliberate way, "but later the King took him into his own service, he, as I have heard himself relate, being very apt upon the fiddle and the King in sore need of some one to play for his dancing."

"And did you know him then?" asked Ann, her heart going out to this little fatherless fiddler; but Margaret Blagge shook her head with a smile.

"No, I was but a babe at that time, but later, when I was about my seventh year, I too went to France, where it was my misfortune to live some time with the Countess of Guildford, Groome of the Stole to the late Queen. It was then that I first met Mr Kelston, for the King, coming on a secret visit to his mother Mr Kelston attended him, and I remember very well how on a certain day he found me in tears (for I was very unhappy at that time but for the mercy which God vouchsafed me) and he, being himself but a youth, took me upon his knee and would know my trouble; and when I told him that they would force me to forsake my blessed religion, he comforted me as best he could, telling me of how the same great severity had been practised upon his Grace of Gloucester, and with what determination he had resisted. Of how, indeed, when the Prince might not read anything unobserved, he himself had learned by heart such arguments as Dr Cosin could convey to him, repeating them to the Prince at night, and used by him with great skill against his persecutors. 'And I trust,' said he, which I remember shocked me not a little, 'that his Royal Highness understood one quarter of what he said, for I most assuredly did not.' With which he kissed me and bade me take heart, and I cannot help thinking that he must have spoke word of it to the King, who mayhap spoke for me to her

ladyship, for it is certain I was never again so severely treated."

"And did he play to you?" asked Ann.

"Not to me, but that night, being present with others of the Court, he played for the Princess Henrietta to dance, the same she did with uncommon grace and beauty. But come, Mistress Kennedy, we neglect our duties in this idle talk."

"Yet one thing more," pleaded Ann. "I have been told that my cousin is a Presbyterian. Is this so?"

"I should be glad," replied Margaret Blagge gravely, "to think that Mr Kelston hath truly religious convictions of any kind," and added with a little sigh, "for, indeed, he hath a good heart."

CHAPTER III

THE only person at St James's with whom Ann felt perfectly at home was the nine-year-old Princess, Lady Mary of York, a graceful, sensitive child with much of the charm of her race. She was at the time very lonely, for her little sister, the Lady Anne, being in ill-health, had been sent abroad to the care of her father's youngest sister, Princess Henrietta of Orleans, Madame of France, her destination being, however, carefully kept secret from Protestant London, for Madame was a Catholic. Mary's other friend, the daughter of Sir Allan Apsley, had lately left the palace, and the companions chosen for her, daughters of her governess, Lady Villiers, were little to her taste. Ann, young for her years and herself lonely, had been very ready to sympathise, and it was not long before she had heard all about the Princess's devotion to Frances Apsley, the letters they wrote to each other, and their secret names of 'Aurelia' and 'Clorine'; and, it is to be feared, she was quite ready to abet her young mistress by occasionally conveying one of those highly romantic epistles, all unknown to Lady Villiers, to whom she had taken an unaccount-

able aversion and who disapproved the correspondence of the Princess with her '*Deare husban*', *Aurelia*.'

Returning from such an errand, Ann found herself, some three days later, crossing the Park between Whitehall and St James's. She had been longer than she intended, and would certainly be reprimanded by the Mother of the Maids if her absence were noted.

Steps behind her and a voice calling her name made her turn. A youth arrayed in the height of fashion, yet wearing his clothes without the ease of one born to Courts, was hurrying after her.

"Is it indeed Mistress Kennedy? I thought so light a foot could belong to no other, yet could scarce believe my good fortune." Ann laughed. The speaker was known to her, a north country lad come to Court near as recently as herself. Aware of his gawky ways, the youth was anxious to overcome his shyness and emulate my Lord of Rochester and the gallants of his type, but of this Ann was happily unaware. To her he seemed only an overgrown schoolboy, as unaccustomed to town ways as herself, and she was not displeased to have companionship, for the alley was lonely and the afternoon already darkening.

"Truly, sir, the Court has wasted no time in turning you into a compliment maker," she said gaily.

"All must follow where the King leads," he murmured, and seized her hand.

She saw then that he was not quite sober, but she had still no thought of fear.

"Are you going to St James's?" she asked him, trying gently to release her hand. "If you are, I shall be glad of your company; but let us be moving, for it grows late."

"Why, yes, Mistress, I shall be proud to escort you, but first let me claim my fee," he cried, his round boyish face pink with excitement; and in what he felt was a truly rakish manner he drew her closer.

Instinctively she drew back.

"What! Has the King claimed sole right?" he sneered.

The tone more than the words, for she had no idea

what he meant, angered her, and as he lurched forward in a second futile attempt to reach her lips she cried proudly, "Keep your distance, sir, and let me go," and as he still persisted she struck him with her free hand a smart box on the ear.

He rapped out an oath, unloosening his hold upon her to clap his own hand to his head; then as she would have slipped past him, his mood changed and he caught her, out now to punish where before he had but meant gallantry.

"You shall pay for this, you little she-devil," he cried, and pressed her to him. She gave a stifled cry, for she was frightened now though by no means conquered.

On the instant, miraculously it seemed to her, her tormentor's grip loosened and he was swung from her. A pair of strong hands held him by his collar and the seat of his breeches, and he was gently but surely lifted from the ground, shaken, as one might shake an offending puppy, and laid face downwards across the sturdy yew hedge, conveniently curved to receive him.

The King? Seeing only the black curls and the tall figure of her rescuer, Ann was for a moment tempted to think it; but in the next he turned and she saw her mistake. This man was younger than Charles, whom indeed he resembled only in height, a certain free grace of movement, and that curious indefinable likeness so often found in those who have lived much in each other's company.

The eyes that met hers were friendly, though perhaps a trifle too full of amusement for so romantic an episode, yet Ann's lonely heart leapt as she looked at him. Here surely was some one to be trusted, the friend of whom she stood so sorely in need. Before either could speak, the youth had scrambled to his feet, spluttering with rage but considerably sobered.

"Sir," he cried, "your name? My friends will wait upon you."

The tall man turned and regarded him with good-humoured interest.

"Why, Sir Cock Sparrow, since when have you descended upon our quiet city with your roystering ways? I do not know your face." His voice was pleasant in spite of a faint drawl on his 'Rs,' but the lazy amusement of its tone drove the youth before him to a final burst of fury.

"My name, sir, is Sir Cuthbert Moule, Baronet, of Greyshott, in Northumberland. I am second cousin to my Lord Rochester and gentleman to the Duke of Monmouth. If your title is sufficient I shall meet you, sir; if not, you must submit to the horsewhip for insulting a gentleman."

"Alas! sir," said the big man gravely, "my mother never having been to Court, I have no title; yet, methinks, I should indeed have to 'submit' if the whipping is to be performed by yourself, even with my Lord Rochester's assistance." He held out his strong lean hands in a somewhat foreign gesture, and the whimsical anxiety in his face drew from Ann a quick hysterical laugh.

"Your name, sir?" cried the boy, stamping with rage and hurt pride.

"Simon Kelston—plain Simon Kelston—yet if you know aught of single-stick, sir, we might——"

"I know your name," Sir Cuthbert broke in, "my friends will wait upon you." And with that he turned, bowed to Ann with the best grace he could muster, and, well aware that he had been laughed at, fled from them.

"And now, my young mistress, it grows late; whither may I escort you?" Kelston turned to the girl, his voice had grown a little stern, but at the sight of her innocent, eager face, his own softened again.

"It is late. I carried a message to Mistress Apsley. I—" she hesitated, looking at him distressedly, for what indeed must he think of her, but to her relief he laughed.

"'Clorine and Aurelia'? So you are already enlisted in the service? You will get into trouble you know, we all do. Come, then, let us see if we cannot get back unnoticed." He offered her his arm

and she laid her fingers upon it timidly, her heart beating so that for a moment she could not speak. This then was her cousin Kelston, her rescuer and protector ; but she must make herself known to him. She stopped again.

"My name, Mr Kelston, is Ann Kennedy." He bowed low, but with obviously no recognition of the name, and flushing a little Ann continued :

"If you are, as I suppose, Mr Simon Kelston of Kells in the Stewartry, we are related, your grandmother being my mother's aunt."

"Kells in the Stewartry !" he said. "How long it is since I heard of it as that. So we are cousins, Mistress Ann ? I fear I have given little heed to my Scottish kin—or they to me for that matter—i'faith, I see now that I was foolish," he bowed again. "I hold myself more fortunate in my new-found relation than my Lord of Rochester is in his," he added, with his pleasant smile.

That stopped her once more, caught by sudden fear. "Sir, he means to send you a challenge," she said.

"He means to, but I do not think he will," he said unconcernedly. Then as she still looked doubtful, "Do not distress yourself, Cousin Ann, even if he does and I think my Lord Rochester will see to it that he does not, I shall not fight him."

"Oh," said Ann, and said no more. She did not wish a duel, of course ; it would be dreadful if either of these gentlemen should kill the other for her sake, but that he, her new found hero, should so unhesitatingly refuse to risk his life—it was not thus they behaved in the ballads and tales of romance.

Kelston stole a glance at the perturbed face by his side. Perhaps he read her thought, for his long mouth twisted humorously.

"Would you have me turn Herod and slay babes ?" he asked as they reached the privy garden. "He had had more drink than his little head could hold, he will make you suitable apology in the morning, I doubt not."

"For my sake I would not have you fight," she

replied with dignity. "Indeed, sir, you punished him sufficiently." The thought of Sir Cuthbert's legs struggling out of the hedge brought the smile back. She looked up shyly, meeting his eyes; he did not look like a coward. "But he threatened and insulted you," she hesitated again and saw he was laughing at her.

"You'd liefer not own a cousin who cannot protect his honour, eh, Mistress Kennedy? Well, keep your mind easy, if the worst comes to the worst, I will give him satisfaction, but I think he will not wish it. The King has forbidden duelling, you know," and with that she had to rest content for they had reached the palace. "Come this way," he said, and led her by passages through which she had never before been, but which brought her directly to the Princess's own apartments.

They found Lady Mary playing with the two daughters of Lady Villiers, but on sight of the newcomers she sprang up, throwing herself upon Mr Kelston with an eager "Simon, Simon Kelston, you have come back!"

He caught her up, held her high for a moment, then set her down and ceremoniously kissed her hand, she laughing the while.

"Did you see *her*, Mr Simon, is she better?" He laid finger on lip, looking mysterious, but she tossed her curls, pouting. "There is no one here to tell tales. I want to know where you have been."

"And so shall your Royal Highness. At what are you playing?"

"I love my love with an 'A,'" said the younger Mistress Villiers pertly.

"Because she is adorable," said Simon, and sat down cross-legged.

"Her name is Aurelia," said Lady Mary, clapping her hands.

"Or Ann," said Simon, and smiled at Mistress Kennedy, who blushed rosily.

"Oh, Simon, you have seen her," cried the little princess.

"We met under the acacias," he went on, taking no notice of her, "and I fed her upon——"

"Nothing to do her hurt, I trust, Mr Kelston," said her Grace of York from the doorway.

"Nothing, your Royal Highness, but good English apple-pie to assuage her home-sickness withal," he answered her unperturbed, and was on his feet without effort before the flustered maids had scrambled to theirs.

The Duchess gave him her hand to kiss, smiling at him; there was something singularly disarming about this young man it seemed. "And he is my own cousin," thought Ann with a thrill of pleasure.

"You have been abroad, I think, Mr Kelston," said the Duchess. Their eyes met, and he too smiled.

"I have," he said. "I went to buy a fiddle in a fair land where the radiance of King Soleil seems hardly less by night than by day, and all bask in his golden rays. I was on my way to relate my experiences to your Grace, should you so desire it?"

The Duchess laughed, raising her brows. "King Soleil is doubtless a wonderful restorer," she said. "Come then." And with a glance round the apartment, "Mistress Kennedy, you may attend me in the withdrawing-room. No, Mary, later, I doubt not, Mr Kelston will assist you in finishing your game, in the meantime, remain where you are."

Alone with him in her closet, the Duchess held out her hand. "You were at St Cloud?" she said, and in spite of her effort to repress it, excitement showed in her voice.

He took a package from his pocket and gave it to her.

"Yes, I saw the Lady Anne who sent her respectful and loving greetings. She is already wonderfully improved in health and spirits; but Madame has herself written all news of her."

"Yes, yes," she nodded absently, taking the package but laying it down unopened. "I knew she would be well cared for at St Cloud." Then eagerly, "You gave my message to Madame?"

"I did, your Grace."

"And her answer?" She had seated herself, but her foot moved impatiently as she waited.

"The Princess is naturally delighted that you should turn for consolation to what she has always been taught to believe is the true Church," he said, as if he repeated by rote.

"Taught to believe!" she cried bitterly. "Is that all it means to her? Taught to believe!" she mimicked him. "There speaks true Stuart; to Charles, religion is statecraft, to Madame, something accepted from childhood, to James it is fear of Hell. Bah! those Stuarts."

"Your Royal Highness speaks of a family it is my privilege to serve." He spoke quietly but with a note of warning, though for the moment she was too excited to notice it.

"And have I not served them, too?" she cried. "Did not my father serve them? You will say we should be grateful that at least Charles, unlike his father, saved his servant from the scaffold?"

"I was never one of those who flung stones at the Chancellor, Madam," he said gently. This time the quiet voice calmed her, and with an effort she threw off her tragic mood. "There is something strange about you," she said, "that we all come to you with our confidences. I think it is that we have known you so long—you and your fiddle. Yet to expect you to approve a conversion to Rome is surely foolish?" In spite of her effort toward lightness, there was a touch of wistfulness in the question. Haughty woman though she was, she was terribly alone.

"I'faith, I'm not so sure," he answered readily. "I had as soon be Roman as Anglican if I had to change."

"Charles has changed; mayhap you will have to?" she hazarded. But at that he only laughed and would be drawn no further.

Nor did the Duchess seek to press her advantage. She had regained her usual cool composure, and, touching the packet by her side, "I am glad you

thought my little daughter well," she said; "that she will be happy with her cousins, I doubt not. But what of Madame herself? You may speak plainly," she added, "I, at least, tell no tales."

He flung out his hands French fashion. "What is there to tell that is not common talk? M. l'Evêque de Valence is sent to L'Isle Jourdain, her most faithful attendant is dismissed, this too by the French King's own orders though he professed always to be her friend; is it wonderful that Monsieur triumphs, or that his favourites are more insolent than ever?"

"The joys of marrying a king's brother, sir," sneered the Duchess, then more gently, "Poor Henriette, she was not meant for suffering, and God knows she has had her share."

"She has a high courage, Highness," he said, and stooped to kiss the hand she held out to him.

"I do not doubt it," she answered. "Yet I would pray that the faith in which she has been 'taught to believe' may comfort her, Mr Kelston." And with that she dismissed him.

Walking back to Whitehall Kelston was inclined to wonder whether her last speech had been in truth a prayer or a gibe. The Duchess's tongue was noted, though he himself seldom came under its sting. She looked ill he thought, and certainly she was little to be envied, her father disgraced, her sons dead or dying, and her husband spending his time between the confessionals of the priest and the boudoirs of other women.

Passing through the antechamber he had astonished his new found cousin by admonishing her to be kind to her mistress, a request which seemed to Ann to put the Duchess in something of a new light.

CHAPTER IV

MR KELSTON had passed through the Holbein Arch into King Street, when a man came out of the Duke of Monmouth's apartments in the Cockpit and, seeing

him, stopped. "Mr Kelston," he said, with a military salute, and as Kelston acknowledged the name added, "You are the very man I was looking for," and stood squarely in the other's path. He was a man of middle height, bronzed and soldierly, but with a curiously drooped eyelid which gave him a sinister expression; his manner of address too, half-sneering, yet more confidential than their acquaintance warranted, was unpleasing.

"I have not the honour——" Kelston began with his faint drawl, but the other cut in :

"Oh, as to that, Charles De Morgan at your service, Captain in the New Guards of his Grace of Monmouth. I am the bearer of a challenge from Sir Cuthbert Moule. Seems you insulted him, Mr Kelston, a fire-eating young man whom nothing but blood will satisfy. He desires you meet him to-morrow morning. Leicester Fields."

"Are you a friend of Sir Cuthbert's ?"

"Well—no," said De Morgan. "I was at play with the Duke and my Lord Rochester, when he bursts in upon us crying for blood. He fancies his swordsmanship, and, between you and me, my Lord Rochester would not be sorry to see him instructed."

"Tell my Lord Rochester," said Simon gravely, "that I doubt not a little sober and godly advice from his lordship will bring his young kinsman to a more excellent frame of mind; and send him to make suitable apology to the lady, who is my cousin, without further interference on my part. As to this challenge, his lordship has possibly forgotten his Majesty's edict against unnecessary duelling."

Friends of Simon might have smiled at the slight emphasis on 'unnecessary.' Captain De Morgan was disappointed and showed it.

"But surely, you cannot refuse this young gentleman satisfaction. I do not impugn your courage, of course, but——"

"No ?" said Mr Kelston sweetly, "that is good."

His indifference annoyed De Morgan; besides Rochester had promised him sport. "I am a duellist

myself, sir," he boasted. "I have killed my man before now."

Kelston drew his breath through his teeth in a depreciatory "tch! Clumsy swordsmanship that," he said sympathetically, "so careless, but practice with foils should help you; nothing like practice." And raising his cane to his hat, he turned into Whitehall passage and left De Morgan speechless.

Mr Kelston's rooms at Whitehall were on the river-side, adjoining the King's. They consisted of a dining-room, with servants' accommodation behind, and an inner chamber in which he slept when not in attendance. From this inner room a curtained door led by a short passage to the King's bedroom; but to this door Charles alone had the key.

In a recess behind the bed hung a small, beautifully carved reliquary and a lamp, at the moment unlighted, and on a chest by the bed-foot lay a violin case. When Mr Kelston entered this inner room his servant was busy unpacking a small travelling valise, and a clean lawn shirt hung airing before the log fire.

Mr Kelston's servant was a man of somewhat remarkable appearance, his thin stooped figure and the straight snow-white hair which framed his face giving him a venerable aspect, in odd contrast with his youthful complexion and the long curled lashes that shaded eyes blue and vision-lit as a child's. Strangers found it difficult to estimate his age; he was in reality little over fifty, and had served in Mr Kelston's family since he was a boy.

Kelston took off his heavy riding coat, then unbuttoning his waistcoat he took from an inner pocket a leather case, which he laid upon the table. For a few moments he stood warming his hands by the fire, for the evening was chill, then he turned and looked across at his man with a quizzical expression.

"Did ye ever hear tell of a niece of my grandmother's who married on a Kennedy?" he enquired.

"Aye, did I," was the prompt reply. "Mistress Jean Douglas she was, and a bonny lassie. She and your father were gey and sib when they were bairns;

her mother had died young and she was often at Kells House ; then the war came and parted them. Your grandfather, singular, faithful man that he was, upheld the Covenant to his last breath, while her father was no better than a malignant, so there were high words between the two, and we saw no more of Mistress Jean—a bonny bit lass. Later we heard that she had married Sir Walter Kennedy of Batherston, him that was out with Montrose, ye'll mind ? But what gars ye speir on that old tale now, Kells ? ” he ended suspiciously.

“ I saw her daughter to-day,” Simon explained as he sat down, stretching out a booted leg for his servant’s ministrations. “ She is maid of honour to her Grace of York and but late come to Court.”

“ The worse for her, poor lassie, that she should come at all to this thrawn, Godless place.”

“ Tuts, Davie, spare your havers, and get me out of those boots,” his master laughed. “ We are not all as bad as we are painted.”

“ If you are not,” came the grim reply, “ it’s because of the grace of God sought for you in many a sore night’s wrestling by David Gourlay, striving for you against the Devil himself in prayer and fasting, for a’ the world like the patriarch Job, while ye fiddled and danced with no thought for your salvation.”

Yet, while he talked, his blue eyes alight, his skilled fingers were busy with his master’s toilet, and Simon, knowing that his care included body as well as soul, took his rating with good nature. Suddenly the man’s tone changed.

“ Are her eyes the colour of the hazels that grow by Kells burn ? ” he asked, bending to adjust a rosette on his master’s shoe, “ this little Mistress Kennedy ? ”

Simon looked down at him with an amused stare.

“ Lord ! David Gourlay, ye have wrestled with such good effect that I have not the faintest idea what colour her eyes are,” he said, and added, “ Were Mistress Jean’s like that ? ”

“ Aye were they,” said Gourlay, taking up his master’s discarded apparel and preparing to depart ;

his face was grim as ever, but there was a faint pink about the high cheek-bones, and he did not look at Kelston as he shambled off to the door, then turning abruptly, "Have ye dined, Kells?" he asked.

His master came out of a dream. "Yes," he said, "but bring wine and pipes in here; and, David, sit yourself in the outer room and let no one in, a hundred to one some roystering blades will be round, and I shall not want to be disturbed."

After the man had brought the wine and tobacco and had gone, Kelston sat for a few moments looking into the fire, then he got up, took the leather case from the table, drew from it a smaller embroidered one of silk, and from this an oval miniature set in brilliants. On the back of this, in a round, childish hand, was written: 'À mon ami, Simon,' and below 'Anne.' The face that smiled up at him from the miniature was that of a girl, a charming, happy child. The man's dark face was strangely tender as he looked at it, yet even so a half rueful smile played at the corners of his mouth. Gourlay's revelation had had in it a comparison more tickling to his master's humour than to his vanity. David too had had, it seemed, his 'Lady of Dreams.' 'No wonder he is patient with my whimsies,' thought Kelston, 'hazel or blue, what matter, so we love them?'

He stood a moment longer looking at the innocent, laughing eyes of the portrait, and as he looked the smile died in his own and his long mouth straightened to a grim line; it was not thus that he had last seen those blue eyes, the years had brought to them disillusion, weariness, the flicker of tears behind the long lashes, though, thank God, they had not yet quite killed the laughter.

With a quick sigh Kelston replaced the miniature in its case, and crossing to the reliquary, unlocked it and put the case within. Then relocking it, he brought a spill from the fire and lighted the tiny lamp.

As he finished the curtain over the King's door was drawn back and Charles came in. His glance passed from Kelston to the lighted lamp, and his brows rose;

nevertheless he raised his cane to his hat in a salute, half serious, half mocking.

"For a Presbyterian, Sim, you have some strangely popish tricks," he said.

"Is there a saint in your calendar more worthy, sir?" the younger man demanded.

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "Oddsfish! that's not for me to say, but it would be hard to find one more adorable; I will bear you out in that, Quixote." He sat down, kicking the logs with his toe and watching the sparks.

Kelston filled one of the long pipes and handed it to him. As he bent to get a light the King roused himself.

"So, Simon, I heard from Sir Ellis Leighton that you were returned, seems you came on the same packet; but you had had, he told me, no luck, the fiddle was sold."

Charles's face was more than usually sardonic. Simon's, as he answered him, wore an expression of one resigned to misfortune, apologetic yet hopeful of future betterment, the perfect blending for a servant whose failure had been due more to innocent stupidity than to any lack of good intent.

"Sir Elisha was perfectly informed, Highness. It was unfortunate, but, I trust, not irremediable. Signor Lulli believes that he can procure another and even finer instrument by the same maker."

"You saw Lulli then?"

Simon had done so; moreover, at this interview he had had the honour of being present during a visit paid to the musician by no less a personage than le Roi Soleil himself.

"Like you, sir, the King of France is at times pleased, informally and unexpectedly, to shine forth upon his servants."

"Humph," said Charles, "you of course withdrew?"

Naturally Simon had made to do so, but his Majesty had graciously bidden him remain. He had in great condescension enquired the reason of his mission,

examined his old violin, and even carried the bow to a window recess the more readily to examine it. Simon's face during this recital wore, unchanged, its look of reverential innocence ; but at the mention of the bow Charles gave a sudden laugh, bringing his hand down with a clap upon the table.

"And you two played it out, for all the world as if you were on the boards of The King's Playhouse ? And Louis the more owlsh of the two, I'll be bound. I would I could have seen you at it. Was he alone ? "

"On the contrary ; Monsieur, his brother, and one or two others were with him."

Charles laughed again. "And the bow ? " he asked.

Kelston picked it up and handed it to the King, who took it carefully. Simon had lighted a candle, and held thus to the light, a tiny but perfect seal could be distinguished on the screw. Having examined it, the King broke it, unscrewed the top and drew from the inside of the wood a long twisted slip of thin paper closely covered with cypher. From his pocket he took another paper, and smoothing the first carefully between his fingers he proceeded, grown suddenly serious and alert, to the work of deciphering the letter. And while the King worked Mr Kelston sat on a low stool by the other side of the hearth, his eyes on the little lamp, his thoughts far away—for when Charles came through the curtained door he left ceremony behind, and both went back almost unconsciously to the easy freedom of their days of poverty and exile.

That Charles should work as he was doing now, carefully and steadily, did not surprise Simon Kelston, though it would have surprised many a habitué of the Court, for Simon belonged to that small inmost circle who knew the King, not only as he was but as he might have been. Charles had always been an avid worker when his interest was aroused, the pity was that it was now so seldom aroused. This game of intrigue, the playing off of one nation against another, faction against faction, party against party, was one of the

few interests left to him. Simon knew very well that this message which he had brought, more secret than the secret papers of more official messengers, was of a nature to horrify not only the country at large but possibly those also who imagined themselves in possession of such intrigues as the country dreamed not of. But Simon Kelston served Charles Stuart—and one other—and for the rest, country or parliaments, Holland, France, or England, he cared not a jot.

His thoughts had gone back to the Duchess of York and her conversion to Rome. There had been a good many 'conversions' lately, for Rome was fashionable in certain circles, the more so that one did not need openly to leave the Established Church. A secret conversion, a thing to be whispered behind a hand or hinted at with a wink, added interest in the eyes of the fair ones and involved little or no danger. Lord! But the strange thing about the Duchess was that she was in earnest, she did not *want* to change, she was apparently impelled to do so from conviction. Conviction interested Simon, who had not often seen it.

"His Most Christian Majesty," said Charles, breaking in on his thoughts, "is a most damnable hard bargainer."

He got up, pushing the papers from him, and began to walk up and down. "It is Buckingham will be the trouble," he burst out angrily, "a reprobate and a blasphemer without a genuine belief, but he will be the Protestants' champion for all that, God help them! He will never pass those clauses. I warned Henriette, but Louis—the most Catholic King—insists. Oddsfish! How God must laugh at us all."

From his stool by the fire Simon watched his master's look of weary amaze; in the firelight his own face showed faintly impish.

"If there be clauses that my Lord Duke cannot stomach," he said slowly, "—and God help us indeed, for they must be tough morsels if his Grace cannot hold 'em—why trouble him about them? Let him be busy on the treaty he understands, busy and very

secret. His Grace loves secrecy. For the rest, why should he know more? So you sign, does the King of France care who is cheated?"

"A second treaty? Would Louis consent?" Charles was thinking aloud.

"Madame," said Simon and said no more.

Charles stood looking at the floor, his brows drawn together, his lower lip stuck out. Suddenly he broke into a sardonic chuckle. "Sim Kelston, you have it. I am sick of Buckingham and his interference, it will be vastly amusing to watch him agitating himself over nothing and 'twill keep him out of mischief; besides, as you say, Henriette can manage Louis, and 'twill be the more reason for her coming. His Majesty has promised she shall come. Did you know that? I will write to-night, but you will have to carry the message yourself, my lad." The weariness had gone from his face and his eyes were alight with mischief; he looked for the moment more like a schoolboy planning a prank than a monarch engaged in a difficult and dangerous negotiation with a brother monarch. To mystify the mystifier and befool his fellow-conspirator, especially such a one as Buckingham, whose conceit was notorious, was meat and drink to Charles. "I will write at once," he repeated. His glance travelled to the lamp and from it to Simon with a mocking smile; but before he could speak his thought the attention of both men was caught by an uproar in the next room.

"Have him out, I tell you we must see him, sirrah."

"That," said Mr Kelston, "is my Lord Rochester's voice, he is egging on a young gull of a cousin whom he wishes me to fight."

"Why should you fight him?" enquired the King.

Kelston shrugged his shoulders. "I found him kissing a girl who did not wish his kisses, and so put him in a hedge. My lord is only fooling, he wants a repetition of the Marchmont affair. Confound David's conscience that will not let him lie convincingly," he added as Gourlay's voice, high and plaintive, rose above the din.

"It is no use, my lord, Mr Kelston is not to be disturbed I'm telling you, and I will not open the door."

"Stand out of the way then, and I'll open it myself," Rochester's voice answered him. "What, is it his pretty cousin engages Mr Kelston that he cannot meet his honourable obligations? Damme! that's an idea. Out of the way, come, out of the way and let us see whom our prudish Simon has got hid in his chamber."

There was the sound of a scuffle and an overturned chair.

Kelston turned to the King. "If you will go, sir," he said hurriedly, "I will open to them. My lord is drunk as usual, and I do not wish David hurt."

"Open the door," said Charles, "we will see this through together."

"As you will," said Kelston, and did as he was bid.

Gourlay, with the table held in front of him, stumbled back almost on the top of Kelston, so closely was Rochester's sword point pressing him to the door. Behind my lord De Morgan and one or two others stood laughing, Sir Cuthbert hanging rather shamefacedly in the rear. Kelston's appearance was greeted with a shout.

"Bring out the lady, Simon, she can hold the stakes while we fight for her. Sir Cuthbert here is a fire-eater; can't hold him back, I promise you." Then as the eyes passed from Simon to the other tall figure, an uncomfortable silence fell on the group.

"Old Rowley or the Devil," said Rochester, and dropped his sword point.

The King seated himself on the edge of the table and surveyed the crestfallen group.

"Your sword, my lord?" he said, and the Earl slipped it back into its scabbard with a muttered apology. "Which of you," continued the King gravely, "is Sir Cuthbert Moule? Ah!" (as Sir Cuthbert was hastily pushed forward) "Sir Cuthbert, it seems, has a grievance, the rest of you have my permission to retire."

"Damme, sir," began Rochester, but the King silenced him with a look. No one could be more haughty than Charles when he chose.

The gentlemen bowed and withdrew, Rochester last. When they had gone and the door was closed, the King turned to Sir Cuthbert.

"You, sir, it seems have challenged this gentleman to a duel. How long have you been at our Court?"

"About a month, sire," said Sir Cuthbert.

"And during that period have you never heard of our edict against duelling?"

"But—but, your Majesty," began the miserable youth, but the King cut him short.

"But? But? I will have no 'buts' to my orders, sir. You think your honour needs avenging; are you capable of avenging it?"

"I trust I can at least die in the attempt," said Sir Cuthbert grandiloquently.

"So be it," said Charles. "Take off your coat." He got off the table as he spoke, stretched himself, and addressed Gourlay.

"David, ye old vagabond, shift this table into the corner and give them space. Bring me two rapiers of your master's," and in a lower voice, "buttoned ones and some chalk, Davie, I'm for no murder—Now, Simon."

Somewhat reluctantly Kelston came forward. The King having carefully chalked both buttons handed each of the combatants a rapier. The two men faced each other, and Kelston saluted, French fashion.

Sir Cuthbert had fancied himself as a swordsman before he left Northumberland, and for the first two or three seconds he continued in this opinion. Then "Now, Kelston," said the King, and with what seemed to Moule miraculous swiftness his opponent's rapier passed beneath his guard and touched him over the heart. Then for the space of three minutes that fatal button danced over and under his, until his fine purple waistcoat was dotted with white and he could have wept for sheer mortification.

"Enough," said Charles. And before the word was

well out Cuthbert's weapon had left his hand, curved itself in the air, and fallen at his feet. Kelston stooped, picked it up, and returned both foils to David. He looked, could Cuthbert have observed him, troubled and a little shamefaced, the victory had been too easy to give any satisfaction and he was sorry for the boy, who stood cast down and with difficulty holding back his tears; but the King had no mercy.

"Now, sir, you will perhaps appreciate why we forbid duelling, and you perceive also to what your friends would have publicly submitted you."

"If Mr Kelston will give me but one more chance without the buttons," said Cuthbert miserably, "it will not waste much of his time." Death seemed to him in that moment the only friend.

"Nonsense," said Simon gruffly. "You are no bad fencer for an Englishman, 'tis only that you know but one school. I can give you the address of a Frenchman in Friday Street who will put a polish on you. As for this afternoon, Sir Cuthbert, I meant no offence, but you were mighty drunk, you know, and the lady is my cousin."

"I shall offer her sincere apology, sir," said the boy.

"Then let's say no more on't," Simon said readily, and held out his hand. Then as Cuthbert shook it fervently, "Brush Sir Cuthbert's waistcoat, David, and bring ale, or will your Majesty take wine?" quoth he, "for to say truth, both Sir Cuthbert and I are devilish thirsty."

CHAPTER V

It is easy to depict the Court of Charles as a veritable sink of iniquity, and to quote Mr Evelyn's description of the last Sunday in that monarch's life as all too typical of the rest. Yet we misread even such scenes of dissipation and debauch unless we remember that through them, unscathed, walked men like Evelyn

himself, as fine an English gentleman as any age has produced. Charles, bad though he undoubtedly was, never lost his admiration for virtue ; too lazy to restrain vice in himself or others, he never deliberately drove anyone, as he himself had been driven, into the paths of corruption.

To John Kelston, going out to die before the gate of Worcester that his king might gain time to escape, Charles had promised that if he survived he would care for Kelston's son, and up to his lights he had kept his word. If Simon had sometimes in his boyhood gone hungry and ill-clothed it was because Charles himself had little to eat and hardly a coat to his back ; and that he had escaped the worse evils of such companionship was not entirely due to Gourlay's stern watchfulness, but rather that his own natural fastidiousness had amused the King, who, though he took no trouble to hide his vices from the boy, had never pressed him into the uglier forms of service which he required from such back-stair pages as Bab, May, and Will Chiffinch, and received without asking from his Grace of Buckingham.

Simon had grown up with little Latin and no Greek, but he had acquired a fair knowledge of modern languages, and spoke French like a Frenchman. He could dance well, play the fiddle, and beat the King at tennis. Above all, he had learnt all that was to be known of the noble art of defence while other lads were still in the nursery, and that under such masters as the great Kreussler in Germany, and the greater Besnard in France, which in itself was sufficient to make men respect his prejudices ; and this they did the more readily that, though eccentric enough to desire no mistress of his own, he was invariably civil to theirs. To the enquiring mind of his age young Kelston had added a toleration good-natured rather than cynical, taking the world as he found it and finding it, being easy-tempered and likeable, a pleasant enough place. Only at times, as he trimmed the lamp before the secret reliquary or brooded, chin on hand, by the fire in the King's bedchamber while the

palace slept, there was that in his face which betrayed a longing not entirely subdued.

Ann learned a good deal about her cousin of Kells in the weeks that followed the incident in the Park. Sir Cuthbert Moule from an enemy had become a most devoted admirer. His apologies to Ann had been ample and his attentions to her so assiduous, that the girl's head might have been turned had she not been inclined to believe that it was that he might talk to her of his hero, rather than for any merits of her own, that he so constantly sought her society.

She was not ungrateful for Sir Cuthbert's attentions, for now that he had changed his model, he was a very pleasant young gentleman, and even at times reminded her of Walter ; but that day in the Park had promised another friendship, and, well, if *he* did not choose to talk with her, why should she care ?

On the Sunday after the King had returned from Windsor, where he had been making young Albemarle a Knight of the Garter, Ann sat with the other maids in the great hall at Whitehall, where the Court was as usual busy with gaming and music. She could see Sir Cuthbert looking for her, but she had withdrawn behind Margaret Blagge who, absorbed in a book of devotions, seemed undisturbed by the clamour around her. Ann envied her her serenity ; she was tired of flirtation and light talk, shocked too by the desecration of the Sabbath which she saw on all sides, but humbly aware that she herself lacked that deep personal religion which made it possible for Margaret to withdraw her mind and meditate undisturbed.

In the gallery a boy sang to the accompaniment of fiddles, and the thin sweet tones, rising above the chink of coin, the laughter and talk, seemed to the girl strangely pathetic and brought a lump to her throat. At home her mother and Walter would be at the afternoon sermon in the Tron Kirk. How often in the past she had rebelled at this second session of the day ; but now, in a wave of home-sickness, she longed to be back in the old church, dreaming her dreams,

while good Mr Paterson's eloquence poured unheeded over her head. 'I would listen now,' she thought, with the contrition of an exile, and then—'Mr Kelston would not come to the Tron if he were in Edinburgh, most like he would attend one of the Indulged ministers, as he doubtless does here.' And with a sigh her mind went back yet once more to that day in the Park, with its unfulfilled promise of friendship.

From where he sat talking to Frances Stuart, Duchess of Richmond, Kelston watched with some amusement his young cousin's manœuvres to rid herself of Sir Cuthbert. His own neglect, had she but known it, had been more friendly than it seemed, for Simon knew the Court well enough to be assured that for a scandal to be set afoot by my Lord of Rochester it needed even less foundation than this fiction of his intimacy with his cousin, and that if it once started the victims themselves would hardly know where truth ended and lies began, so circumstantial would the evidence become; therefore, until my lord's unscrupulous wit found other fields, Kelston had deliberately refrained from any intercourse which might remind him of his drunken insinuations. Now, however, Rochester was undergoing one of his periodic absences from Court and there was no longer need for precaution.

Simon found his eyes resting on his cousin's profile with a new interest. She was better looking than he had supposed, there was indeed something piquant and unusual about her which was undoubtedly attractive.

Duchess Frances, by no means the fool some supposed her, followed his eyes and perhaps read his thought. "Who is she?" she asked, and added, "She hath something of the moorlands about her."

"Of the hazels that grow by Kells Burn," he said with a laugh. "She is, I believe, a cousin of my own, through her mother. Her father was Sir Walter Kennedy of Batherston."

"A cousin of your own? Why, gypsy Simon, I never heard you claim a kinswoman before, though

I've seen many a one willing enough to claim you. Why do you not marry this one and carry her off? She will never make a Court lady." She smiled at him, for she, too, was fond of Simon Kelston, having owed him not a little in the days when she stood much in need of an honest man's help; for her sake he had come nearer to a break with Charles than ever in his life, and she did not underrate that service. But he only laughed at her now, meeting her eyes with frank amusement in his own.

"Why, your Grace, I do not know that her family would consider me much of a match, nor" (with an apologetic shrug) "am I sure that I desire the honour." For a moment a question hovered in her face, but she only said, "Nor the responsibility, I suspect, sir, from what I know of you!" Then rising, "Well, go talk to her at least, for that is but cousinly, and I must to the Queen," and as he walked with her to the door of the long gallery, she added, but half below her breath, "'Tis a pity though, for you would make a good husband, and God knows, they are rare enough."

"Oddsfish!" said he, using the King's oath, "what match-makers be the newly married." He smiled down at her affectionately, for this light-hearted young Duchess, who, for all her frivolity had withstood a king, was a creature after his own heart. He was glad the smallpox, from which she had but lately recovered, had left her still so good to look at.

To Ann's mind too, for all her scars, 'la Belle Stuart' was the handsomest woman at Court. The two were, she thought, as they passed her strolling down the long room, a goodly couple and well matched. They stopped for a moment to pass some jest with the King, she heard Mr Kelston's infectious laugh, and smiled to hear it. Then they passed out of her line of vision. Yes, a handsome pair, not that Mr Kelston was, in face, handsome; he was too lean and brown, his features too irregular, his mouth too long. Nevertheless, she thought defiantly, she would sooner look at him than at the Duke of Monmouth's insipid beauty, or that dreadful wreck, his Grace of

Buckingham, glass of fashion and the mould of form to an earlier day.

"Cousin Ann," a voice behind her spoke her name softly, "tell me about Kells in the Stewartry."

She turned quickly and to her vexation her cheeks flamed, so pat had he come upon her thought of him.

"It is your own place, Mr Kelston. Is it so long since you saw it for yourself?" she asked, trying to be severe.

His mocking eyes fell in assumed contrition and his hands went out in that foreign gesture she had before noted. "Nigh on twenty years," he said, "a lifetime—more than a lifetime for you, Mistress Ann." Then suddenly grave, he went on, "but I can still remember old Sandy Morrison lifting me to my father's saddle-bow, and he kissing me and bidding me remember that if he came not again Kells was mine; and then, I know not how long after, Gourlay came back in the night and there was talk, and Eppie (do you know old Eppie?) weeping and bewailing; and then—then a journey to France, and I have never seen Kells since." He stopped, looking at her, the mockery gone from his face, and in its place something wistful and boyish. "Tell me about Kells," he said, and seated himself on the floor by her stool, clasping his hands about his knees. He had, she thought with a renewed thrill of pleasure, a curiously easy control of his movements.

"You can remember very little about a place you left so long ago as that," she said. His brow puckered. "I remember a great courtyard," he began. Then the surprise in her face stopped him, and he laughed, "maybe if I saw it now it would not seem so very great?" he hazarded, "but I will tell you just how it seems to me. Inside there was a hall, and beyond a room with a large bed in which my father slept, and a little one at its foot where I myself lay. I remember the kitchen, not what it was like, but the smell of hot bannocks and the look of the hams hanging from the roof."

"And outside?" she asked eagerly, "do you

remember the country ? The Rhinns, when the mist draws its soft cap over their heads ; and the moors and the little hazels that grow down by the Kellside. Oh, it's bonnie, bonnie."

"Hazels," thought Kelston, and he looked up at her dancing eyes with an inquiry in his glance which she did not understand. "You get beyond me there, Cousin Ann," was all he said. "I will tell you what I do remember though, the old tree on the knoll which was called the hanging tree, though there was no one ever hanged there to my knowledge."

"Oh," she said with a shudder, "'twas there they hanged young Sandy."

"Hanged Sandy Morrison, old Sandy's son ? I remember him. 'Twas he first taught me to fiddle. Hanged Sandy ? whatever for ?"

"He had been out at Pentland and he had a gun. They took him up to Edinburgh and tried him and then sent him down for an example."

"But he was *my* man," cried Kells. "They had no right to hang him without my knowledge. I'll have at my Lord Lauderdale for this." For once he was roused from his lazy indifference ; but Ann laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Best leave it, Mr Kelston, you cannot bring back poor Sandy, and the people will not thank you if you draw my lord's attention to them now."

He looked at her, puzzled and frowning, but before he could ask further the King's voice was heard rising above the clamour of tongues.

"Where is Simon Kelston ? Send Mr Kelston to me ; something ails this dog."

Kelston was on his feet in an instant, and Ann watched him cross the long room with his swift easy stride, the women around the King making way for him as he knelt beside the chair the more readily to examine the little whimpering creature on the royal knee. For a moment the noise hushed and eyes turned from all directions to the two dark heads bent over the spaniel, then the jangle of sound burst forth again ; only the ladies who had been so lately sunning

themselves in the royal favour stood in heavy silence, resentful of this interruption.

A moment longer and Ann saw Kelston rise, the little shivering dog held tenderly in his arms and to the final annoyance of the ladies, Charles also got up and the two left the hall together, to be seen no more that evening.

It was very hot in the King's room that night. They had had an extra large fire for the little sick dog, but at two o'clock it had slipped all their efforts and died on Simon's knee. Now the cinders had an unpleasant way of dropping noisily just when sleep seemed about to descend, and the truckle bed was uncommon short for Kelston's long limbs. The fire blazed up, making strange shadows on the walls, dancing shadows as if a man danced on the hanging tree. God! he remembered Sandy Morrison quite well now, should never have forgot him, for 'twas he made the little fiddle Simon had taken with him on that first strange journey into France; a lanky, shambling lad, 'soft Sandy' the servants at Kells had called him, a man who would not have harmed a kitten, and they had hanged him for rebellion!

Plainly across the years came back the vision of an evening in the hills: Sandy with his fiddle beneath his chin, and the look of rapt, worshipping joy that changed his dark vacant face and awed the child who listened. There had been red warm lights on the rocks and a wealth of golden bracken, and far below them on the moorland the old grim tower of Kells. There would be gypsy blood in young Morrison mostlike, as there was gypsy blood in his own veins, if all tales were true.

Another coal dropped, and Simon sat up cursing softly; he got out of bed, stretched himself, and went to look at the King. Charles slept profoundly. If Simon had forgotten much about Kells it was because Charles hated Scotland; it was a banned subject when the little boy came to him first. Then, Simon had not known why; later, one New Year's

Eve at Bruges, when the hopes of the Royalists were at their lowest ebb, that knowledge had come to him.

Charles had been lost ; messengers had arrived from Scotland and he could not be found to receive them. The faithful Hyde was in despair. Simon, knowing most of his master's haunts, had found the King in vile enough company in a low quarter, and had dragged him unwillingly back at the risk of both their lives. It had been a night of sleet and whistling wind, their lodgings were of the barest, and food none too plentiful. A man whom Charles had trusted had been that day discovered a spy, neither the first nor the last in these pitiful times.

A man more discreet than Hyde would have let the King alone ; even Simon, a lad of sixteen, could see he had had his fill ; but Hyde, too, was nervous and overwrought, nor could he ever remember that Charles was a man. That night he had chided him as a child, rating him with high-flown talk of his honour as a king and his duty to his country.

Charles had stood it for a time, as he stood most things in those days, half scornful, half sullen, till some sudden word broke his reserve. Honour ? What honour should he have since the Scots stole the last shreds from him when they crowned him King on just such a New Year's Day as this, forcing him to swear away every loyalty he owed ? Once begun, he bared his seared, miserable young soul in a fierce, incoherent outpouring that one, at least, of his hearers never forgot. Kelston had realised then why his master hated Scotland and the Presbyterians who had dragged from him his last vestiges of self-respect. At the time he had thought he, too, hated his country, but to-night it was strange how those old memories called him. He came back and lay down again, but sleep would not come. He remembered the Pentland rising well enough of course, the terror of the bishops, the talk of invasion by the Dutch, with whom the Scottish peasants were said to be in league ; even in

London there had been some panic. But Charles, at the height of his desire for La Belle Stuart, had cared very little for anyone or anything else. Simon, on whose protection the girl had more than once thrown herself, had had his hands full; for, for all his devotion to Charles, he was, as has been said, neither a Chiffinch nor a May to pander to his vices.

David, he remembered now, had been more than usually morose, and he had known vaguely that the Stewartry was engaged; but that they should hang his own man, and he but a half-witted dreamer, was an ugly thing to think on.

A little friendly tongue licked his hand as it hung over the bedside. Putting it out farther, Simon lifted a spaniel to his bed and stroked its soft head. "Poor old lady, do you miss your mate?" he asked her softly, "lonely, eh?" and as if to answer him, the little dog nestled to his side comfortingly. "Look you, Chérie, I have a secret for you, can you keep a secret? Mimi is coming," he whispered in the silken ear, "Your own little Mimi, old lady, think of that," and as the tail thumped appreciation, Simon too forgot his new troubles, and slept.

CHAPTER VI

It was early in April that the discussions on Lord Ross's Divorce Bill began to give way before a new and alluring subject, the rumoured visit of the King's youngest sister, Princess Henrietta of Orleans, Madame of France.

It was nearly ten years since as a girl of sixteen she had come with her mother to that family reunion which had followed the Restoration. Yet even on that brief visit, so tragically overshadowed by the death of her elder sister, the Princess of Orange, the young Princess had established a reputation for charm, beauty, and kindliness, which made the prospect of her return a matter of pleasant speculation even to those younger members of the Court to whom

she was little more than a name. And this reputation was greatly enhanced by all who, having been to France, brought home stories of her Court there, of its masques in which she acted, of her patronage of the Arts—her dancing, her gaiety, and her wit. The Duke of Buckingham was reported madly in love with her, and his Grace of Monmouth could hardly speak without tears of her kindness and good humour during his recent visit. Now that the prospect of her coming had become general talk, every traveller was assailed with questions; Madame's mode of dress, her fashion in coiffure, Monsieur's jealousy, the King's latest gift to her, even the size of her sealing wax was discussed and commented upon, with a hundred other details.

To Ann Kennedy the thought of this visit was fraught with an especial interest, for, from her babyhood, Madame had been to her an almost fairy princess. Was not Lady Dalkeith, the Princess's governess, her mother's relative by marriage? A somewhat distant one, perhaps, but Lady Kennedy had delighted to relate to her daughter the tales of the little Princess's adventures when, after the Queen's escape to France, she had been left in Lady Dalkeith's charge.

Ann, at all times a hero-worshipper, had woven many a tale of romance about her Princess, and now the hope of actually seeing her for herself filled her with excitement.

Thus one exquisite April day, on the terrace of St James's, she listened eagerly to the unfailing topic. Behind the girls, busy with their embroidery, the long windows stood open, for the day was unusually warm for the season; in the room cards were, as ever, in progress, but the game was not serious and those gentlemen nearest the window joined from time to time in the talk. A sudden disparaging word from Captain De Morgan drew the attention to him. He had been to France with Monmouth, but it seemed he was far from sharing his master's admiration; even Madame's good looks he was inclined to treat with a

shrug. In so universal an enthusiasm this cynical attitude must needs arouse interest.

"But surely, sir, the Princess must be beautiful, else why is she so admired?" cried Mistress Howard, stopping with poised needle to regard this bold iconoclast.

"Perhaps because she is a princess, my lady," he sneered back.

Mistress Howard shrugged her own pretty shoulders, and with a quick glance round to see there was no tale-bearer near. "The Queen is the Queen," she retorted, "but I do not find she is for that reason more admired for her beauty than—'the Lady,' let us say, or even Miss Nell."

"If I am to forget Madame's royal blood and speak merely of her feminine charms, I should say her looks compared but ill with either of the enchantresses you name," he answered coolly. "Yet that she has power to charm, even as they, no one may deny who has seen the lovers crowding her Court."

"Is it true that Monsieur is so jealous he will scarce let her from his sight?" asked Sir Cuthbert, who was one of the players. De Morgan had a trick of insinuating more than he said.

He lifted heavy eyelids now as he drawled sneeringly, "Does my Lord Castlemaine show jealousy of his lady? To be sure, Monsieur can banish a de Guiche, or desire his Grace of Buckingham's recall to England, but there be lovers even the Duc d'Orleans cannot afford to notice."

There was a moment's silence; everyone knew at whom he hinted, and there was a feeling that he trod dangerous ground.

"You mean the King of France?" said one of the players in a low voice, but De Morgan, a little elated at the sensation he had caused, laughed in a manner singularly unpleasant.

"Far be it from me to suggest names for all who love this immaculate Princess or her ladies," he began. But Ann could bear no more; she had forgotten herself and her shyness as she listened with

hot cheeks to this more than disparagement of her heroine. It was not the timid country girl hardly noticed by her smarter town companions, but the assured, much made of young lady who ruled her mother's household at Pulquhanity, that now stopped the scandal-monger with an imperious, "Be silent, sir. It is very easy to take a woman's character from her," she cried, as her indignant glance swept the faces before her, "when there is no one present to defend her."

The men shifted uneasily, the situation was becoming more serious than they desired, for Captain De Morgan was reputed a swordsman and known to be a bully. Even the fire-eating Sir Cuthbert felt it hardly necessary to take up the quarrel of a woman whom he had never seen; besides, he did not wish to make a fool of himself again before Mr Kelston. The latter had been talking at the other end of the room to the Earl of Glenample, an elderly nobleman whom Cuthbert regarded with a jealous eye because of his attentions to Ann Kennedy. Kelston had only a minute before left him to watch the play, he came forward now; it seemed to Ann, who had not known that he was present, that he always did come to her need. He was smiling a little, you might suppose him unconcerned but for the narrowed watching look in the black, unsmiling eyes. He did not look at Ann though he addressed her; instead, his gaze seemed pointedly to fix itself upon the pile of gold before De Morgan.

"It is not only easy, Mistress Kennedy, it is at times extraordinarily convenient," and the narrowed eyes left the gold and passed to the faces of the other players. "Gentlemen, I would warn you that when you play with a Welshman it is wiser not to let yourselves be distr-r-acted from your game." The slightly rolled r seemed to add to the deliberate insult of the words.

The players regarded him with horror. This was the last thing they had expected from the easy-going Mr Kelston. De Morgan was on his feet.

"Do you dare to insinuate—?" he began, but Kelston stayed him with a gesture.

"I, sir, insinuate—nothing, merely that I have heard that when one plays with your countrymen it is better to attend to the game; that you are winning these gentlemen can see for themselves."

"But we were all talking, Mr Kelston," began one of the players hesitatingly.

"On the contrary, you were listening—and losing. If you will ask Captain De Morgan to show you his hand, you will observe it is an uncommon good one."

De Morgan threw his cards on the table. "You lie, sir," he spluttered, almost speechless with rage. "Your attack upon me and my country is a damnable lie. I defy you to prove it." His sword was half out, but Kelston swung round upon the frightened girls, laughing.

"Now, ladies, I beseech ye to look at the faces of these gentlemen; they have nothing to go upon but my crack-brained accusation, yet already they more than half believe that the Captain has cheated them. Thus, in an instant and by hearsay (for what did I see of the game?), does his reputation fly to the winds to join those others that Mistress Kennedy was but now so ably defending."

Mistress Howard clapped her hands, and a little sigh of relief ran round the other ladies.

"Lord! Mr Kelston, what an actor you be. I really thought you meant it, and so, I do believe, did these gentlemen, for they positively look askance at the Captain, and he, poor man, quite guilty! And you are right, dear Mistress Ann," Mistress Howard added handsomely, "I for one will never hear a word against poor Madame again, nor her maids either; but you should be on the boards, sir. We must tell Mr Betterton to give you a part at The Duke's, seeing how well you deceived us."

He bowed with a theatrical sweep of his hat, and with that turned back to the men who still sat uncertain by the table.

"Captain De Morgan will, I am sure, forgive me,"

he said gaily. And then dropping his voice so that only the players could hear. "For God's sake carry on the farce to the women, or our quarrel will be half over London and we in the Tower before we have time to settle it. I have called Captain De Morgan a cheat, which he may or may not be—a liar he certainly is—but if he is not a coward as well he will do nothing now to stop his chance of the satisfaction I am more than ready to give him. Therefore assist him, gentlemen."

The appeal was answered at once.

"'Pon my honour, Mr Kelston has so rudely broken our game, ladies, we will with your permission carry him to the Mall, and there, if he prove not so good a player as he is an actor, he shall pay Captain De Morgan double his winnings. What say you, is not that fair forfeit?" laughed Mr Griffen, one of the players; and the others agreeing, the party broke up in apparent good humour.

Any lingering anxiety which the ladies may have felt as to the issue of Mr Kelston's daring jest was relieved by the presence of all the principals that afternoon at the King's playhouse; and her Grace of Richmond's ball, which both Sir Cuthbert and Mr Kelston attended, drove further remembrance of the affair from their minds. But Ann Kennedy, who was on duty that night, knelt in her room before a great bowl of white violets and held to her beating heart the tiny note which had accompanied the flowers: "To Mistress Ann Kennedy, protectress of all maligned ladies."

The Duchess's ball ended at midnight. Two hours later a gentleman of the road drew hurriedly into shadow to let a couple of horsemen go by across Wandsworth Common, realising hastily that they were too well mounted and armed to be of use to him.

"Putney Heath," said one of the riders, reining his horse to a walk as a cloud swept across the moon, "is an excellent lone place to fight in, but it's the devil to come at, and the fellow under that tree would be a tough customer to handle if he had not

sense enough to know his masters when he sees 'em."

"What fellow?" asked Sir Cuthbert astonished, "I saw no one."

Kelston laughed. "When you've ridden as many crooked roads as I have, mon enfant, you'll learn to see in the dark," he said. "But why Putney Heath, d'ye suppose?"

"It is on the Portsmouth Road," said Cuthbert, "If—if anything happened, De Morgan is desperately angry and talked pretty wild," he added apologetically. "Griffen thought maybe it might be handy to catch the 'Portsmouth machine' and slip across the water for a bit till the thing blew over."

"Hum," said Kelston meditatively. The moon had come out again and by its light his mouth showed a trifle grim. Sir Cuthbert, looking sideways at him, felt his own discomfort growing. The whole affair had seemed to him so like a play, it had given him a pleasing sense of importance to be acting as second to a person of Mr Kelston's renown; but now, in the chill moonlight, with waste land around him and unknown danger lurking in every shadow, it was slowly dawning upon him that this was no play, but serious business. How serious he had not yet quite realised, as his next question showed.

"Can you play with him as you played with me?" he asked. "He is reputed a swordsman and boasts, I've heard him myself, of the men he has killed."

"Do you suppose," asked Mr Kelston grimly, "that I am riding over this blasted heath when I might be peacefully sleeping in my bed, just for the pleasure of nicking De Morgan's buttons? No, my lad, you and Griffen may cross the water if you choose, and maybe 'twill be a wise move, but De Morgan is going a longer journey ere this day is far advanced unless, that is, he sends me first upon my travels."

Something in the quiet deadliness of his voice made the boy beside him shiver. "I do not know why you want to kill him," he muttered. "I do not believe

he was cheating, nor, I think, do you. It is not like you, Mr Kelston, to pick a quarrel and kill your man."

Simon looked at him for a moment. It seemed he might be about to explain, then with a slight shrug he changed his mind. "I do not like his looks," he said, "there be some wor-rms well enough above ground; but, for the most part, they be best under the soil."

An hour after dawn, when in the pale clean light of the new day the birds flooded the Heath with song, and before the inhabitants of Putney hamlet had arisen to their labours, the combatants faced each other in a secluded spot where a patch of soft turf spread invitingly beneath their feet, and great bushes of yellow whin shut them off from any chance observer. A fifth man, standing somewhat apart, fumbled in his satchel and stifled his yawns as best he could, for he had been dragged from his bed by Mr Griffen, being a doctor, and possibly serviceable.

Mr Griffen, having consulted Captain De Morgan, had just stepped forward. "I am empowered by my principal, Mr Kelston, to say to you that even now, if you will publicly withdraw your extraordinary libel against him, he is willing to accept your apology and——"

Kelston, already without his coat and long waist-coat, was turning up the frilled shirt sleeve on his right arm. He paused, regarding Griffen with raised brows, but at the word apology, they drew together in a sharp frown.

"Zounds!" he cried, cutting in before Griffen could continue. "Have I not publicly called De Morgan a cheat and privately added that he is a liar and a slanderous one to boot. Does your principal require still further insult to make him fight?"

"No," cried De Morgan with an oath, "No, by God, I have killed men for vastly less. Look to yourself therefore, and your blood be on your own head," and without further courtesy he rushed red hot upon his adversary.

"Why, that's a better spirit," said Simon lightly, as he stood on guard. The seconds, more deliberate, saluted and fell to. Cuthbert, thanks to the Frenchman in Friday Street, found he could hold Mr Griffen easily enough; neither of them had any intention of hurting the other if it could be avoided; the merest finger-prick would satisfy. Presently, therefore, Sir Cuthbert having succeeded in getting over Mr Griffen's guard and inflicting a half-inch scratch upon his arm, they dropped their points and bowed ceremoniously, while the doctor, glad of employment, hurried forward.

Left to himself, Sir Cuthbert turned his attention to the real combatants. For a moment he thought them well-matched, for De Morgan's style was showy and blustering. He stamped, passed, and volted in a manner very impressive to the young Englishman until he looked at his face and was undeceived. Already the sweat stood out in diamond points on the guardsman's forehead, already his eyes were growing desperate and his breath shortening. Kelston, on the contrary, fenced as he did most things with an almost careless ease. He was cool, imperturbable, biding his time. De Morgan had won his reputation on a trick, disallowed in most schools of the sword but deadly to the ignorant. He tried it now. Cuthbert heard Mr Kelston laugh sharply as he stepped back, and the next instant De Morgan's sword flew from his hand.

"Pick it up, I cannot kill you weaponless," Kelston cried fiercely. This last trick had drowned any compunction he might have had. But De Morgan's nerve was gone, he had put all his trust in this cut known to so few, and now, with a moan, he fell on his knees. "For God's sake, do not kill me, I swear to you I did not mean to play that trick now, I swear to you I did not cheat before, spare me," his face was working with terror.

Kelston gazed at him, the expression of his own face changing slowly from the joy of a clean anger to that of pained disgust. Then, as if remembrance

overwhelmed him, "And this dastardly wretch having looked upon the sweet graciousness of a Princess, dares to besmirch her with his vile slanders. God ! It is not to be borne," he cried ; and dropping his rapier he caught the kneeling man by the throat with strong hands, "You snivelling, slanderous craven," he snarled, and shook him till his eyes bulged.

"Sir, sir," cried the physician, for the others stood by in apparent unconcern, "You will kill him in very truth, and in a manner too much akin to murder."

His voice seemed to pierce Kelston's passion, for as suddenly as it had arisen it died, and his grip loosened.

De Morgan, his face already blackened, sank to the ground as Kelston, wiping his hands as one who would wipe off dirt, turned from him. Then Mr Griffen spoke.

"I think we need not trouble further, sir," he said, addressing Kelston. "Dr Sprigs can, I doubt not, do all that is required for—this person, to whose slanders no one is in future like to take heed. If you gentlemen will honour me at breakfast, there is a not bad inn in Putney, for all the place is but a village."

CHAPTER VII

GREAT was the consternation at Court when it was known that the King was going to Dover to meet his sister, and that she was not to come to London at all. Abuse of Monsieur ran high ; this was but another example of his abominable treatment of his wife. Many reasons were given but all united in exonerating Madame ; the more so, when in some mysterious way the story of Ann Kennedy's defence of her, and something also of the consequences, had leaked out. All were now eager to uphold the Princess's honour, and only the absence of accusers prevented swords from being drawn. Ann herself was to come in for a share of this popularity, but for the moment she was unaware of this. The first part of the news had

plunged her into woe, and the white violets were freely watered by her tears; nor were these assuaged by such pious comfort as Mistress Blagge had to offer, until that gentle lady was fain to hold out the hope that the Duchess of York might be called to go to Dover, and that if she were, Ann *might* be among those chosen to attend her.

"There is a mighty lot of mights about it," the girl pouted, "for all the world like a bit of old cheese." But for all that the idea was not to be refused, and she had already dried her tears when Dorothy Howard broke in upon them with the news of the quarrel.

"Is not our Mistress Ann a deep young lady with her innocence and her country ways, yet here we have duels being fought in her honour, not the first I'll be bound, seeing how calmly she takes it. Nay, nay, Ann, it is no use looking surprised and pretending you know naught, sure everyone believes 'twas for you Mr Kelston fought, for all the talk of cards."

"Fought! Has there been a fight, oh, Dorothy, he is not hurt?"

"Which?" laughed the tease. "Mr Kelston is not hurt, you may be sure; why, he is said to be the finest fencer in London. Fie upon you, Miss Innocence!"

"'Twas Madame was insulted," said Ann, very rosy——

"Madame!" Dorothy scorned her. "Why, Madame, for all we talk so much about her, is old, twenty-five at least, and sure is it likely Mr Kelston is going to risk his neck by killing a man for some one he has most like hardly ever seen? No, no, my country mouse, if, as is probable, he is in the Tower now, it is you are to blame. Mr Kelston of all people! You may well be proud."

"If one gentleman be dead and another in pain of his life 'tis no matter for pride," said Margaret Blagge gravely; then looking from the window she added, with no little relief, "But there goes Mr Kelston walking with the King, so maybe the whole tale is a silly exaggeration."

"'Twas Captain Graham told me, he swore he had

it from one who knew," Dorothy protested, as they watched the two tall figures striding across the Park, the elder leaning on the younger man's arm and talking with more than his usual animation, while several other gentlemen, shorter of limb and of breath, did their best to keep pace with them.

It was the following morning in the rooms of the little Lady Mary that Ann next saw Kelston. It was the Princess's birthday, and all the Court had been to pay her compliments and wish her well. Now she sat curled up on the broad window ledge, and Kelston, his fiddle under his chin, was playing for her a rondo that young Purcell had composed in her honour.

He had beautiful hands, thought Ann, watching the long brown fingers moving lovingly over the strings, so strong and yet, as now, so tender, surely it was impossible that those very hands had killed another human being? It could not be true. She tried to keep her attention upon the conversation of my Lord Glenample who, as Cuthbert had indignantly noted, had of late taken some trouble to make himself agreeable to her, but in spite of herself, her attention wandered again to the player. And this time the little Princess looked up and, catching sight of her, "Ann, Ann," she cried, as the music finished, "that tune was written for mine own self and by a boy not so very much older than I. Would you not like music written for you, Mistress Ann?"

"Very much indeed, your Royal Highness, but no one would think of writing music for me."

"Ah! You are not a princess," said the young lady, her head on one side. Then with a swift embrace, "But I love you very much, dear, dear Mistress Ann," she confided, and ran off to speak to the King with whom she was a favourite. Lady Castlemaine called to Glenample, and under cover of the general noise and laughter Ann moved to where Simon still sat fingering out the music with soft touch. He looked up at her smiling and made room on the window seat.

"He may want to burn this when he is older; but

he is a clever child and worth watching," he said, touching the manuscript. Ann took no notice.

"It is not true, Mr Kelston?"

"What is not true, Cousin Ann?" he asked, surprised.

"That you have killed Captain De Morgan."

His brows rose slightly. "I am sorry to say it is not," he said politely regretful. Then, with quick change of tone, "Child, child," and put a hand on her arm, for with the relief she had turned white and faint. "Would it have been so great a matter an' I had?" He was still more than half-amused, but she caught him up reproachfully.

"Mattered? That you had murdered a fellow-creature for an idle word? Fie on you, sir! that you can make a jest of it." She was so serious that he must needs be serious too. "Was the word then so idle? You did not seem to think it when you resented it so hotly."

"I resent it still," she answered, "yet I think he talked but for the love of talking, and I could not have borne that he should get his death at your hands."

"No, he was not worth the killing, a snivelling cur," he said distastefully, and though this was not yet quite the proper spirit, Ann did not feel she could preach further, instead she said shyly, "You have always been very kind to me, Mr Kelston."

"Why not Cousin Kelston—or better still, Cousin Simon?" She smiled at that, though her face was wistful. But before she could answer an interruption came, a newcomer had arrived, a large red man, whose presence seemed to fill the room, as did his loud blustering voice. "The King of Scotland," murmured Simon, and Ann turned to recognise my Lord Lauderdale, the Commissioner.

Having paid his addresses to the King and complimented the Princess, he stood looking about, and presently catching sight of the two in the window came towards them.

"Well, Mistress Kennedy," he said, laying a kindly hand on her fair head as she curtsied to him, "I

saw your mother before I left Scotland and promised I would convey her affectionate greetings to you; she was in her usual frail health, poor lady, but on the whole well. Young Walter has gone to Glasgow to be under Mr Burnet; you knew I'd made your old tutor a professor?" Then with a nod at Simon, "He would be sorry to see you wasting your time with this fiddler fellow, the most ignorant young gentleman in all this ignorant Court, my dear, fit for nothing but fiddling and fighting," he flicked at the violin with contemptuous fingers, a hatred of music being one of his many peculiarities, and winked broadly at Ann. "He cannot so much as construe *Amo*, if all I am told is true; but maybe you mean to alter that, eh?"

"Mr Kelston is my cousin," said Ann demurely, and hated herself for blushing. She was not afraid of the Commissioner, having known him all her life.

"Cousin, is he? Well I never heard that relationship came within the degrees," he laughed boisterously.

Here Simon thought it time to save Ann from further embarrassment.

"What Mistress Kennedy has been teaching me, my lord, is the Greek for 'to hang'," he said, "leastways, it's Greek to me that there has been hanging on my own manorial tree and no leave asked."

"Eh?" said the Commissioner, and looked at him swiftly from under his shaggy red eyebrows. "Well, if your tree is in the west country that is all it is likely to be useful for, for a dirtier, more ungrateful set of knaves I have never come across. Even Cassilis had the damned impertinence to vote against my Field Conventicle Act; but he found it did not pay. They all find that. The King is going to be head in Scotland while I am his Commissioner, and the sooner they learn that the better, Presbyter and Bishop alike. That is why I put Holy Leighton into Glasgow's place; thought he was Lord Archbishop and could defy me, did Glasgow, but he could not. D'you think I am going to stand nonsense from a set of rascally peasantry when I would not from

my Lord of Glasgow?" He had worked himself into a passion, but it died again in a chuckle. "Leighton sent his curates down to convert 'em, but they'd have none of his lambs, and to tell you the truth, I don't blame 'em. My new Lord of Glasgow is wily for all his saintly ways; but it is hanging, not conversion, those fellows want." He took a step nearer as Simon edged back and tapped him gently on the chest, "If you are a laird in the west country, it is time you went home and hanged a few of them yourself, instead of wasting your time strum-tumming on a bit of wood and string; if not, you stick to 'Amo, Amavi,' and leave Greek alone." He winked at Ann again and strolled away very pleased with himself.

"Touché," admitted Simon laughing too. "But lord! I wish he would not splutter."

CHAPTER VIII

ACROSS the water a faint streak of light deepened; dawn was come. A moment later, against the golden green of the brightening sky, far off and tiny yet ever more distinct as the freshening breeze blew landward, three sails stood out.

"The Fleet!" From the sentinel on the Castle the shout was caught up, echoed by the watchers on the cliffs, to be answered from the harbour as a boat leapt out, impelled, as it seemed, by an overwhelming desire. In the stern the King stood erect, urging on the rowers with a boyish impatience. Even the Duke of York had lost something of his melancholy, and Prince Rupert's dark face was alight. As for Monmouth, as the spray flew past he flicked the water into the powdered face of his Grace of Buckingham and sang irrepressibly. The foremost ship had come to anchor about a league from the shore, and at the hour of sunrise her flag floated out, the blended arms of England and France, which were Madame's. From the group on board a slim figure moved forward with eager steps.

"Minette!" cried Charles, using her pet name, and waved his plumed hat regardless of etiquette. Her outstretched hands answered him as the barge ran alongside the yacht.

"We could not wait, my Lord Sandwich, so we come to steal Madame from you," the King said as the Earl stepped forward to meet him.

"To none but the King would I relinquish the King's trust," the Earl replied, and bowed low to Madame.

"So well kept a trust may be relinquished with a light heart," she answered, and gave him her hand to kiss. "But how shall I come to your Majesty?" she asked presently, whimsically bewildered over her descent to the barge. Monmouth and Buckingham pressed forward, but the King waved them back. "Put your foot on Simon's shoulder, and let yourself go, Minette. I will catch you."

True Stuart and as careless of convention as he, she prepared to obey, but first looked down at Kelston as he knelt bareheaded. "Shall I not hurt you, Monsieur Simon? But no, you are so strong."

"Always strong enough to serve your Royal Highness, I trust." Her smile thanked him, then her little foot rested lightly on his shoulder and her hand touched his as he steadied her; the next instant she was in her brother's arms.

"Oh, Charles, it is good to be home." She clung to him, weeping a little for sheer joy as he held her to his heart; but soon she must turn to James, to her cousin Rupert, and then to give a hand to each of the dukes who knelt to welcome her. For each she had some word of her pleasure. Already she declared she was rid of the fatigue of her journey, and what a journey! She described the perils of the way, the night spent in a barn cut off from their supplies by a broken bridge; she made them all laugh with her account though, indeed, it had been no laughing matter. Already the air of England had restored her.

On the shore all Dover was assembled to greet her, and from the Castle, as the royal barge drew near,

the guns boomed forth in salute, to be answered by those of the ships. The whole air was full of shouting and waving caps. A child, thrust forward, shyly offered a bouquet of roses. Madame took child and roses to her heart, and the people shouted again, "God bless our English Princess!" Never had there been so joyful a home-coming.

Yet, alone with her brothers, Madame wept again, remembering the mother they had so recently lost, and all that had happened since last she had stood on English soil. All the pent-up misery of her life with Monsieur, all the fatigues of a journey, which the French Queen's love of etiquette and Mademoiselle de Montpensier's jealous pride had vied in making nigh unendurable to this sick and weary girl, were poured out and eased in the first hour of freedom; and Charles, who hated tears in other women, comforted this one tenderly till presently her courage returned, and her ready wit set them once more a-laughing.

The Duke of York had to return at once to London, where rioting had inopportunately broken forth. "James's luck," said Charles, but smiled at Madame behind his brother's back; for James, with his incapacity for compromise, was better out of the way till certain matters were finally discussed, signed and sealed. Simon, standing guard over the door of the King's closet later that afternoon, wondered what the shouting, rejoicing people would have thought could they have been present at the business there enacted. He was not sure what he himself thought of it. Madame, wholly French in her upbringing and sympathies, was perfectly sincere in her anxiety that the brother she loved should ally himself definitely with the King of France. That England was already allied to Holland meant nothing to her; but Charles—Charles, King of England, with England's honour at stake—would he keep better faith with his new ally than with the old? Simon, neither a politician nor an Englishman, told himself the affair was none of his; but that a King's word should mean

more than that of Charles was apt to mean, was an uncomfortable thought which would not be blinked away. Simon, looking covertly across the room, saw Madame's face alight with eager pride and pleasure in this treaty she had so nearly brought to an issue. With the sense of freedom from her husband's jealous watchfulness, and the rest born of this atmosphere of friendliness and security, weariness and age had already fallen from her. She had become a girl again, a beautiful, irresistible child. Surely, if she had persuaded him, even Charles must keep faith? Simon felt the tension about his heart relax as her laugh, rippling like a Galloway burn, broke soft and low across some protest of the King.

From the opposite side of the chamber the only other occupant raised her eyes from her embroidery; almond-shaped eyes set in a face of almost babylike contour met Kelston's for a moment, and a smile, so faint and instant as to be hardly perceptible, yet strangely alluring in its unexpectedness, flickered and was lost again as her glance dropped demurely back to her work. She was Mademoiselle de K  roualle, the youngest but by no means the least trusted of Madame's maids.

A few days later the Duchess of York accompanied Queen Catherine to Dover, and with her, as Margaret Blagge had prophesied, came Ann Kennedy.

To Ann that journey to Dover was a never-to-be-forgotten event. Looking back on it in after years, it became interwoven with what was to follow, so that it ever seemed to her as the pathway by which she passed from the gay irresponsibility of childhood into the tragic joy of youth. So strongly, indeed, did this feeling possess her, that the whole journey grew to be an allegory of her life; the smooth, easy progress of the royal barge which bore them on their first stage, as an infant is borne without effort of its own; the dreamy expectancy of the Kentish lanes through which they ambled pleasantly as through some fairy garden; the slow, more arduous ascent of Barham Common, with ever the Downs ahead shutting out

the journey's end. Infancy, childhood, schooldays ? Then of a sudden, the break in the Downs, and lo ! far off, yet for the moment clearly discernible beyond the gap, white and majestic in the June sunshine, stood the great Keep of Dover Castle ; guardian of the Gate of England, guardian too, in her fancy, of something far more personal and intimate, the gate of youth and love. Seen thus it seemed some huge sentinel barring the way, questioning her right to enter, warning her life was not for ever an easy progress through flowery ways, but rather a fortress to be conquered, if it were not to become a prison in which to pine.

Ah ! But these were afterthoughts. On the first fair sight of the Castle it had appeared to Ann merely as the goal of her desire, the palace of the Fairy Princess. It was thus she accounted to herself for the quick beating of her heart, for not even to herself would she admit that there might be another whose presence at Dover could perchance hasten her heart-beats. Certain, no cloud darkened her first coming, rather it seemed as if the oppression that had so weighed upon her spirits at Whitehall was here lightened and dispersed ; for though here were, to first seeming, all the elements which made up her life at the former Court, to them was added one other which, acting as a philosopher's stone, changed all it touched, the unfeigned happiness of Madame.

If secret business, as some people hinted, had been the reason for her coming such business was surely finished. Henriette was bent upon pure enjoyment ; her time was short, the future loomed darkly, but for the moment she resolutely put all thought of the future from her. No schoolboy freed from his taskmaster could be more whole-heartedly on holiday than was this Stuart princess. The make-believe of merriment and the feverish pleasure-seeking of Whitehall died before her sincerity ; the simple confidence with which she looked to those about her to share her pleasure was irresistible ; even my Lords of Buckingham and Arlington must needs enter into a compact

of friendship and bury their mutual dislike, lest it cast a shadow on her path.

Ann, already an eager partisan, fell an instant victim to her charm. She was indignant with Dorothy Howard for protesting that the Princess was too pale and thin for beauty, refusing to see that it was her graciousness and that charm which she had inherited from her famous ancestress, Mary Stuart, which gave Madame her pre-eminence among women who far surpassed her in actual beauty; just as it was her grace which prevented those about her noticing the delicate stoop which Mademoiselle de Montpensier's jealous eye would have converted into a deformity.

At Ann's first sight of her Madame was with the Queen in one of the larger mural chambers of the Castle. She sat on a low stool, her hand resting on Catherine's knee, while she talked with great animation, the Queen, stiff and prim to outward seeming, watching her with a new eagerness in her sad little face. There was about Charles's wife a pathos that always brought a lump to Ann's throat, and perhaps Madame felt it too, for she certainly went out of her way to amuse and please her sister-in-law. Later in the afternoon, when Ann herself was presented, the Princess, the centre of an eager group of admirers, stood talking and laughing with the Duchess of Richmond; but she turned at once, and taking the girl's hands in hers raised her, and smiling down at her asked: "Is not this the lady who so gallantly upheld mine honour not long since? A relative, too, of my dear Dalkeith, is it not so?"

"By marriage, your Royal Highness," Ann murmured, blushing to find herself the centre for so many eyes. "My mother was related, though but distantly, to my Lord Dalkeith, her husband."

"I care not how distant; any who but name her to me are welcome, for though I was but a child when she left me I can never forget her." Then, as a memory awakened, "You are, I doubt not, a Protestant as she was?" And still holding Ann's hand she spoke over her shoulder to Mr Kelston, who stood

near with some of her attendants. "You do not remember my dear Dalkeith, Monsieur Simon? She was gone before you came to France. But you will remember her antagonist, Père Cyprian de Gamaches, do you not? What arguments they used to have! For she would never be converted, though both he and I tried hard to turn her."

"I remember him very well indeed, your Royal Highness, and my ear tingles at the remembrance, for his hand was as heavy as his theology."

"Ah!" laughed Madame, "that was because you were so stubborn a little Scot. Why, when he first came to France," she went on, turning to the others, "he refused to play his violin to Maman because it was Sunday. Quel gamin, n'est-pas?"

"Madame," broke in a new voice, lisping its English uncertainly, "we have so much heard about this violin of Mr Kelston, may we not hear it played?"

Ann looked up to see Mademoiselle de Kéroualle's eyes raised to Simon's with provoking entreaty, and for a moment the room seemed darkened as if a cloud had crossed the sun; but Madame clapped her hands.

"Why, child, an excellent thought. Simon will play and you will dance—that is, if her Majesty permits it?" This last with a gracious deference that brought a flush of pleasure to the Queen's pale cheeks as she nodded ready acquiescence. She, too, had heard of Mr Kelston his fiddle to which the King himself had danced when in exile. It was in vain for Simon to protest, the ruling had gone forth, only as the violin was at his lodging in the town grace was allowed him until that evening, when they would pretend themselves back in France, poor exiled folk, and Charles, upon a secret visit, should bring his young fiddler and they would dance. And so it was; the King, only too ready for nonsense, led his sister out himself; the Maréchal de Plessis had the honour of dancing with the Queen. Ann found herself besieged by a little old gentleman, or so he seemed to her, who, having heard the story of her defence, a story now grown to such proportions that she herself

could not have recognised it, demanded the honour of dancing with her. He was, she discovered, the Count de Grammont, husband of a lady she had already noted and admired. He scandalised her by his tales of the Whitehall of a few years past, yet she could not but laugh at his droll way of telling them, and for all his age (he was but fifty, though to her sixteen years he might have been a hundred) she found he could dance very well. And Simon, her cousin, sat cross-legged on an oaken table, his fiddle tucked under his chin, and played for all the world as he must have played when Charles wrote to his aunt of Bohemia that they had no one for their dancing 'but one little fiddler.'

Then as the dancers paused, he stood up and played again, not a dance this time, but a strange, sad tune that brought silence to the noisy room, and made Ann clasp her hands above her breast in a troubled wonder of something half-remembered. She was not alone in this; to the little Queen also it seemed to bring some recollection. She gazed at the player with wide-open, wondering eyes, and as the tune died away into silence, cried out sharply, "I have heard that tune somewhere, sometime, long ago at home."

"It is an ancient gypsy air, Highness, I learnt it I know not when."

"Yes, I remember," she cried, "there were Spanish gypsies who sang it beneath the windows of the convent, a sad, sad tune." She stopped, shocked at her unusual lack of decorum, for Charles was watching her with no little amusement. He came to her, however, taking her hand in his kindly way, "What made it so sad, my dear?" he asked good-naturedly.

"It was a gypsy whose love was stolen from him, and everywhere he searched for her night and day until he found her married to a great lord and high above him. Oh, I forget the rest," she said, confused by Charles's laughing eyes, "but it is his longing that it tells about, and I think she, too, was not happy."

“No tune for maids in a convent,” laughed Charles. “For God’s sake, Simon, a more cheerful ditty;” Whereupon Kelston, still standing on the table, broke into a reel tune such as they dance at country fairs, and had all their feet a-jogging. But Ann, too, had remembered; she had heard that tune last outside the walls of Pulquhanity the night after Sandy Morrison was hanged.

CHAPTER IX

ALTHOUGH the Royal Family were still in mourning for the Queen Mother, and Monsieur’s arbitrary commands had forbidden Madame the capital, everything possible was done to ensure the success of her visit, and the resources of the little seaport were taxed to their limit to provide amusement. In dancing, banqueting, and the seeing of comedies the days passed all too quickly. On one exquisite afternoon the Court, accompanied by two men-of-war, rowed to inspect the beauties of the coast; and on that day even Mistress Howard had to own Madame’s beauty, for the sun and sea brought a colour to her cheeks and a sparkle to her eyes, she being true Stuart and a lover of ships.

Ann, too, enjoyed this expedition, perhaps the more so that Mademoiselle de K  roualle, who did not share her mistress’s predilection, had begged humbly to be left on shore; whereas Mr Kelston, who seemed as much at home on sea as on land, was in the same boat with her and sat with her for a long time, and diverted her with stories of the German river boats, and other incidents of his travels.

There was no blinking the fact that the cloud which had for a moment darkened the brightness of her first coming had grown until at times it shadowed all her sky.

Mademoiselle de K  roualle! Once in the half light of a June night and once more distantly, yet near enough to be unmistakable, Ann had seen this girl

with a man's arm about her, loverlike, though she had leapt away as some instinct warned her of an onlooker. On both occasions her companion's back had been turned and he had lounged off at her warning without looking round; but Ann could not, she thought, mistake that tall figure nor the black periwig that the plumed hat could not hide, though it might hide its wearer's face. There were but two as tall as that in Dover, and as one of them was the King, it did not leave much margin for speculation, she told herself, when her heart bade her hesitate; and on that she would ask herself fiercely what affair it was of hers, or what harm if her cousin Kelston chose as did the other courtiers, to kiss a girl on the sly. Ah, but that was not all, it could be no mere careless flirtation with no meaning behind it, for there was a change in Mr Kelston those days. Others might see nothing, might complain, as Dorothy Howard had complained only yesterday, that he was every woman's friend but no one's servant; but she knew better, she could not find words to express the change, but she felt it. He was more alive, happier. Now as he sat by her she stole a glance at him, for he had fallen silent and was watching the yacht ahead, and there was a soft light in his dreaming eyes and new tenderness in the smile that lingered at the corners of his mouth. Surely there was but one thing to account for this new look. Here, in Dover, had come to her cousin that thing which all the tales agreed in calling the most wonderful in the world—love. He was in love; in love? Yes, but oh, could it really be with this baby-faced French girl? Perhaps, after all, she was mistaken, for he should have been distressed by Mademoiselle's absence, and instead, he was sitting there with his eyes on the King's yacht in apparent content. How her own heart leapt to the hope; yet only the day before, as she had gone to read to her Grace of York, she had come plumb upon them in a recess by the chapel. No embracing this time, more like a lover's quarrel indeed, for Kelston sat on the window ledge, an expression half-amused, half-

annoyed on his brown face, while the girl before him stood with downcast eyes frankly sulking. Yet though he would have stopped Ann and drawn her into their talk they had seemed to her embarrassed, and she had been glad to excuse herself by her duty to the Duchess, slip past them, and go her way.

"Madame," said Simon, rousing himself with a start, "is very fond of Mademoiselle de K roualle." The remark, coming as it were so pat upon her own thoughts, made Ann blush hotly.

"Madame is very gracious to every one," she stammered, not quite knowing what she said.

He smiled at that, and his eyes still had that new tender light. "Yes, she is gracious; but this child is specially in her care, I would not have harm come to her. You do not like her perhaps? She is haughty a little?" He paused, watching her downcast look. Then, "Yet be patient with her if you can," he added, and, as if he feared he had said too much, he changed the subject abruptly.

How loverlike to fear harm for the beloved where no harm could be! That night for the first time in her life Ann lay sleepless; she rose heavy-eyed and ashamed. She would do penance for her bitter thoughts; he had come to her for help, and she would do her best to give it though the sword pierced her heart, so she volunteered to take Dorothy's place in the coach with the French maids who that day accompanied their Majesties and Madame to Canterbury. The drive was not a success. Mademoiselle de K roualle thought the English Court *triste*, she could not understand why Madame desired to stay. Yet, reprimanded by one of the others for discourtesy, she hastened to apologise to Ann, declaring that young gentlewoman's French to be so excellent that for the moment she had forgotten she was English. Ann, looking out at the white Downs, the little ancient villages and gardened manors, so unlike her own war-tossed countryside, had been feeling as much a foreigner as could any of her French companions, and replied shortly that she was not English but Scottish. The

distinction was, however, too obscure for the French girl, who only shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Scotland is also the country of Mr Kelston," said Ann, holding her head rather high and looking straight at the other; but if she had had any dim thought of disturbing de Kéroualle, she failed, not the faintest flush coloured the olive cheeks.

"Monsieur Kelston," she had answered lightly, "belonged to so many countries," and suddenly she had leaned forward and called out of the window:

"Monsieur Simon, we talk of you, it seems you are *Écossais*?"

"Did you not guess it, Mademoiselle?" He reined his horse close to the window and bent towards them. "But perhaps you did not know that the Scots are a nation of preachers?"

"Ah," she said, "that accounts for my suffering," and they both laughed. So he had been near her all the time, thought Ann bitterly.

At Canterbury the Duke of York's players were to perform, and a great banquet had been prepared. But first there were places of interest to see in the town, and the mighty Cathedral. The Dean and Chapter were anxious to show the King how much had already been done to restore the order and beauty which the Puritans had destroyed. The Queen desired greatly to look upon the spot where the Holy Thomas had been martyred, "Though, to tell you the truth," laughed Charles, "my sympathy is with Henry, Mr Dean, the King's word should be law in his own land. I would have no Archbishops' interference either," and he grinned wickedly at the Dean, who bowed, making some suitable reply which Ann could not hear. She had been greatly impressed on first entering the stately building, so different in its solemn grandeur from the liberally white-washed churches of her acquaintance; but now fatigue was blotting out all other impressions. Charles was telling a long story which most of his courtiers had heard before, the Duchess of York yawned behind a fan, but the Queen, listening with the rapt attention

she always gave the King, continued to stand, and so must the rest. Ann was just beginning to wonder if the floor was really uneven, or if it was something about herself that made the pillars faintly unsteady, when she felt a touch on her shoulder and turned to see Madame beside her. "Go and lie down somewhere, child," she whispered. "I will bear your excuses to her Grace. You look worn out, and, ah me! I know something of the weariness of standing; go and rest." And with a friendly nod she moved away. Ann murmured her thanks; it was true she felt sick and faint, and was glad to escape to the solitudes. She meant to go back to the Palace of St Augustine which had been prepared for their reception, and to lie down until it was time for their departure; but in her agitation she took the wrong turning and found herself among the ruined monastic buildings. From somewhere near at hand came the shouting of the King's scholars at play. At another time the sound would have drawn her, but now she was frightened, her one desire was to be alone. Turning again she hurried in another direction. Voices and laughter seemed to pursue her, for there were others of the Court who preferred wandering in twos among the sunlit ruins to hanging about in the solemn interior of the Cathedral while the King poked fun at the clergy, and the Queen gazed devoutly at the Martyrdom. A sudden terror seized Ann that Mr Kelston might be here somewhere and Mademoiselle de K  roualle with him. She felt she could not bear that again just yet, and hardly knowing what she did, she pushed open a door and found herself in the peace of an old garden. It probably belonged to one of the preachers' houses, destroyed or put to other uses by the Parliamentarians; it was small, overgrown, and very neglected; but in the warm June sunshine its green fragrance invited rest.

Its very desolation promised solitude. Near the centre an ancient apple tree curved a gnarled branch suggestively; just such a tree grew in the garden at Pulquhanity. Still a child for all her sixteen summers

and her bruised heart, Ann could not resist the lure of the branches ; a moment more, and in spite of her heavy skirt, she had climbed from the lower one into a higher, delightfully forked to receive her. Here surely she was safe ; even if others looked into the garden they would never see her but would go away and leave her in peace. Looking down she saw now that there was an old stone seat on the further side of the tree, but she was too comfortable in her leafy bower to think of climbing down again to occupy this more orthodox resting-place.

Leaning her head on the branch behind her she told herself she must face her delinquencies. Why, oh why, did she dislike this French girl as she had never disliked anyone in all her friendly young life ? Pride and shame vied with each other to hide the answer that in her heart she already knew to be the true one. She had done what no young lady properly brought up, as she had been, should ever have dreamt of doing ; she had given her heart all unsought, yes, all unwanted, she was in love ; in love, not as Dorothy Howard was with three or four young gallants at once, nor with the serene affection that Margaret Blagge seemed to give to her far-away servant Mr Godolphin, but with a passion that uprooted every other thought, and possessed her body and soul. She knew now why in her heart she had rejoiced on coming to Dover, knew, too, why she hated de K roualle. It was no use telling herself that if she really loved Simon she should be glad if he were happy ; she could not be glad, she could not bear that he loved this hateful, almond-eyed girl, *she* would not make him happy ; she was proud and cold for all her ogling, nor was she really much older than Ann herself though he treated her as a woman ; whereas, bitterest thought of all, he never seemed to think of Ann as anything more than a child. And very like a child she seemed as, snuggling amidst the branches, she hid her face on her curved arm and wept.

How could the birds sing so heartlessly ? How could the leaves dance ? How they were dancing !

They were dancing on the ghoull tree at Kells, dancing because their laird and master was bringing home his bride ; and there was Sandy playing his fiddle, poor Sandy, with a bit of rope still about his neck, smiling and nodding to her ; now he was dancing too, dancing and beckoning, pointing to the rope on his neck and beckoning again, but not to her—no, no, Sandy, not Simon, you cannot have Simon, better he marry the French girl than come to dance with you, no, no, *no* !

Ann woke with a start which nearly upset her, and realised that there was some one else in the garden. Still but half awake she peered out between the leaves and drew back hastily. It was Kells himself. It must have been his step that awakened her, for he was pacing slowly up and down just below the tree.

Ann, wide awake now, sat holding her breath lest he should look up and see her here in this tomboy place ; sure he would indeed think less than ever of her womanhood, more than ever would he treat her as a child.

But he did not look at the tree ; instead, he walked past it slowly with hands clasped behind his back and his head a little bent. She was just beginning to breathe freely again and congratulate herself that, finding no one in the garden, he had gone, when he turned and she heard him coming back. There was something expectant in his attitude, and this time, just as he got to the tree, he raised his head as if he were listening, then with a little sigh passed on.

As a bird caught by a serpent's spell, Ann sat motionless, gazing through the leaves. Again he returned, this time he was smiling. He knew she was there, he was teasing her. She would stand it no longer, almost she had moved and called down to him ; but even as the conviction came to her he wheeled again and spoke her name, " Anne."

Until that moment she had never liked her name, thinking it stilted and common, unsuited for romance ; now she knew it was beautiful, the most beautiful name in the world. All the unrealised passion of her young dreams, all the tenderness of the lover, all the

chivalry of knighthood were gathered up in that softly breathed name, "Anne." She could not speak, she could not think, like St Paul she was caught up into the seventh heaven and then, with sick shame at her presumption, she realised that it was not to her that exquisite word was spoken. Another Anne was approaching, coming up the path with that easy grace which was not the least of her charms: Henriette Anne, Duchess of Orleans, Princess of England.

Bareheaded he went to meet her, silent she gave him her hand, and silent but for the once spoken name he led her to the stone seat by the apple tree. Then as she sank on to it wearily, yet with a gesture of content, he knelt, and before she could stop him, kissed each small foot in turn.

She laughed at that, but tenderly as if the tears were not very far away, "Oh foolish Simon!" And as he raised his head, smiling back at her, she passed her hand over his forehead with a half-caressing touch. "How good to be here; do not kneel, mon ami," she said, and motioned him to sit beside her. Then, as if her next words were torn from her without her will, "I am so tired."

She had leaned back, closing her eyes, and Ann, even in her agitation at being thus unwittingly an eavesdropper, was startled by the pallor of her face seen thus in a moment of perfect relaxation.

There was a ring of alarm in Kelston's voice as he protested, "Dear heart, they kill you with all this business."

She opened her eyes at that quickly. "No, no, I love that. You know it, it is my triumph that I bind those two dear countries, England and France, and that Charles becomes Catholic. How Maman would have rejoiced to know that—ah, you frown a little? You do not approve? But you know Charles is not a good Protestant, so surely he is safer in the Church?" Then moving nearer to him, for he had risen at her bidding and was seated on the arm of the bench, she put a hand on his knee. "Let us forget all that for just those few minutes, let

us be children again," and, as instinctively his arm went about her, she leaned her head against it confidently as might a child.

"I am not Duchess of Orleans but just Anne, not a real princess at all but quite an ordinary person——"

"You were never that, most glorious," he interpolated—but she went on firmly, "So poor that I must needs keep my bed, having no fire to warm me, so insignificant that his Most Christian Majesty refuses to dance with me——"

"So? Does that still rankle, my Princess?" he teased her. "Surely the poor Louis has paid for that early *bêtise*?" But she only shook her head at him and repeated, "So insignificant that—that no one has ever loved me but little fiddler Simon."

"Madame, the well-beloved, has toothache," he mocked her; and counting with her fingers on his knee he began, "Buckingham, de Guiche, Tréville, Monsieur—Le Roi Soleil himself——" She stopped him with a hand over his mouth.

"Oh love, love!" she cried petulantly. "Yes, I have been loved—even Monsieur once, and Louis, but why? For themselves, *mon ami*. They loved me, even de Guiche, for something I could do for them, something they expected me to give, but thou, Simon——"

She straightened herself, no longer leaning upon him careless and half in jest but suddenly earnest. "Dost thou truly love me still as when thou wast a boy, asking nothing, desiring nothing, save only to serve me?"

If he hesitated it was imperceptible. "As God sees me, beloved, I ask nothing more in this world."

"Ah," she said, still grave and a little wistful, "in the next world who knows." Then more lightly, "In heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

"Thank God for that," said Simon Kelston and at that they both laughed and the tension was broken. She leaned back again with a contented sigh.

"You are like a great anchor holding my ship,

the waves come and go, beating against me, tossing me about, the anchor is far off hidden in the depths, and I grow afraid and pull, but the anchor is steady, and so I am brave again."

He kissed the slender fingers resting so confidently in his, such frail white fingers, but in spite of its tan his face too had grown white.

"I was so afraid I should not be able to come," she went on, "but de Gourdon is not unlike me, she has taken my place before now, masked, at the theatre when I have been ill, and here where I am not known it is easy enough. Charles guessed I think, but the others think I am resting, except Desbourdes, who is waiting for me at the gate. How overgrown the garden is now."

"Things do grow in ten years," he reminded her.

"Ten years? So it is, a lifetime! How young we were then, how I looked forward to London, and how we laughed over Père Cyprian and his funny fussy ways. Do you remember how pleased he was that he had said a Latin grace at Dover before the English bishops could interfere? He still lives, that poor old man, but Maman and Mary are dead and I am an old woman. Oh, you need not look at me with your funny crooked smile, my Simon, I am old, twenty-six is old in France, and sometimes I think I am a hundred. I was so happy then, so proud to be loved by Philippe and to be the second lady of France, poor fool! I thought it was just because you were jealous that you hated my marriage, but I think you knew even then? Ah, mon Dieu! I have paid for my ambition. Do you know what he said to me the other day on our journey? An astrologer, he told me, had prophesied that he would have several wives, and certainly as he looked at me he could believe it, for I evidently would not live long; and he laughed as he said it. The Queen and Mademoiselle were in the coach with me; even Mademoiselle was angry with him; but he does not hurt me now, I care too little. Yet why does he torture me so?" she cried suddenly, as the bitter memories crowded

back upon her. "I have never been anything but faithful to him and he knows it, while he——" Her hands went out hopelessly, then were clasped above her heart as if to still its torment. "He says," she went on quickly, "he will never forgive me because his favourite, the Chevalier Loraine, is exiled, but I have told him I cannot help that, and he must know that even if I could" (and her beautiful head was thrown up in sudden unconquerable pride), "he might be certain that I could never do so extravagant a thing as ask for Loraine's return."

With a sharp exclamation Kelston interrupted her, speaking swiftly under the stress of an emotion which would no longer be held in check.

"Anne, give me back my promise, let me kill Loraine. Now that he is in Italy no breath of scandal can connect his death with you; a drunken brawl, a duel, and once dead, Monsieur will forget him. Since I was a child I have practised every trick of swordsmanship with no other thought but your service, your defence, and then when I could have served you, you forbade it." Do what he would, he could not keep the bitterness of his passion from his tense speech. "When you made me swear that I would not quarrel with Loraine, you did the one cruel deed of your life; give me my word again, and he will trouble you no more."

"No! No!" she cried, startled by the vehemence her words had brought forth. She put a hand on his arm and found he was trembling.

"Oh, my dear, forgive me." Her contrition was unfeigned. "I should not have talked to you like this, but since M. de Valence is arrested and my dear Saint Chaumont exiled, I have no one I dare trust. I talked but to ease my heart, and forgot your pain, forgive me, dear Simon?" But he was on his knee before her, her hands caught in his.

"Anne, come to me; it is true I have never asked anything, I do not ask it now only to serve you; but to stand by and watch you suffer as you have suffered those past years, is unendurable. We have the whole

world, my Heart, we can disappear and no one will find us. I can hold you against both France and England if you give me leave," and in his passion he believed it, and almost, so did she. For a moment they gazed at each other wondering, waiting, and to Ann, crouched in the branches, sick with the shame and terror of her position, the whole earth seemed hanging in the balance of that look.

Then gently the Princess drew her hands from his; she was trembling with the infection of his passion, but she controlled it and him.

"With you, too, must I remember?" Her voice held no reproach, only a great weariness. He covered his face with his empty hands. The dream was gone. She had asked but one thing from him ever, and ever she had had it—a quiet, steady friendship; she had never remembered the inequality of their positions because she was so sure he would never forget; even now she had compared his heart to an anchor, yet at the first tug his heart-strings had broken, and the anchor, instead of holding had but dragged the poor bark through the breakers, heading for God alone knew what dire rocks ahead.

He spoke quietly and with great humility. "I never failed you before; trust me again, if you can."

"Dear, you would not have loved me if I had played the coward; but, indeed, I do trust you, see——" With a little royal gesture she leaned toward him and offered him her lips, those charming lips with the tiny upward curve, which poet and painter alike had vied in admiring.

For an instant he hesitated, renewing his command of himself, then tenderly he took the sweet face between his two strong hands and kissed her once, very reverently.

"My Queen, I would die to shield you from a breath of cold air, yet can I do nothing while you face the hurricane alone." In spite of his effort his voice shook under the strong restraint he was putting on himself.

"To die," she answered slowly, "is not difficult, I

think, I ask something much harder from you. The anchor is dragged through very deep waters, yet the bark which loses hers can never sail with a light heart. Do not think I underrate your service, Simon, and all you mean to me."

She had risen and they stood side by side. Half unconsciously she plucked a withered rose, twisting it between her slender fingers as she looked round the garden.

"I think we shall not come here again. I think sometimes that Philippe is right and that the voyage nears its end." She shivered, and instinctively he moved nearer, but she smiled at him quickly. "Ah, that is not to hurt you. Why should it? Death must come. M. de Condom says we do not think enough about it; he has helped me much since Maman died. I go often to hear him preach. Does it seem strange to you, that I become religious, I who have thought so little of my soul? It is not fear of death, believe me, not even fear of life, I think, only a great emptiness here about my heart that nothing, no one, not even my babies, can fill." She dropped the dead rose, raising a warning finger as a Cathedral bell chimed the hour. Together they listened like children for whom the hour of recall sounds sadly. "I must go," she sighed, "the play will soon be over and they will look for me. Good-bye, dear Simon."

She gave him her hands and, kneeling, he kissed each upturned palm, reviving with the action some old shared memory of a happier day, so that for all her aching heart she must laugh again, for he would not have her go from him in sadness. And because she saw his artifice, she knew her anchor held firm and was glad.

When she had gone Simon Kelston came back and lifted the withered rose she had thrown aside, and taking flint and steel he made a little fire and burnt it, so no other hand should touch it carelessly. Dead rose; dead hopes. Yet the faint blue smoke curled upward into a bluer sky filled with the eternal promise.

CHAPTER X

IN her tapestried chamber in Dover Castle the Duchess of Orleans reclined among the cushions of her day bed. She wore a white morning gown and, but for the bright spot of colour in either cheek, her face was near as white as her robe, and where her red brown curls were brushed back from her forehead the little hollows on her temples were blue-veined under the delicate transparency of her skin. Before her, as a prisoner awaiting judgment, stood Ann Kennedy. The two were alone, save for Madame Desbourdes who sat in a far-off window seat at her embroidery. The Duchess was very still among her cushions; she did not look at the girl before her and her voice was deliberately haughty as she weighed each carefully chosen word. She spoke in English, of which language Madame Desbourdes had no understanding.

"Your cousin, Mistress Kennedy, answers for your discretion, though how one may feel confidence in the discretion of a young lady who disports herself after the manner of a bird-nesting schoolboy I know not."

"Indeed, Madame, as to that, I know I have no discretion," Ann answered humbly. "My mother has often chidden me for lack of dignity, telling me I forget myself; but it was not of such things that Mr Kelston spoke, but rather of all I so unwittingly overheard. It is for that I do now most earnestly ask your pardon and beseech you to believe that he speaks truth." She came a step nearer and paused, her hands clasped in the earnestness of her entreaty. "I am no talker, Highness, and all that I have heard is locked in my heart as though it had never been."

The Duchess's eyebrows rose slightly, and her voice showed no sign of relenting.

"Yet Mr Kelston tells me that he was for some time alone in the garden. You must have guessed that he waited for some one. Why, if you did not

willingly spy upon him, did you not at once make yourself known to him ? ”

Ann's fingers twisted miserably and her young face was hot with shame and distress, “ I think I had slept,” she whispered. “ I—woke suddenly to find him there, he has always treated me as a child, and I was afraid he would less than ever believe that I am a woman ; I was very foolish, but I thought when he found the garden empty he would go away, then when he did not, I thought he knew I was there, was vexing me—not to hurt me, he would not do that, but just for amusement ; I was about to speak, and then—oh, then, he said ‘ Anne.’ I think for a moment I did not know what I was doing, and before I realised it, you were there.”

At the first naïve confession the faintest shadow of a smile flickered at the corners of Madame's lips, to be repressed instantly ; for, indeed, this was no matter for laughter. It was not her own folly merely, but the secrets of two kings that lay in this child's hands.

Now she looked up quickly, a little puzzled but relenting. She had been schooled in an atmosphere of suspicion and Court intrigue, over and over again she had been deceived and betrayed by those whom she had trusted, yet suspicion was not natural to her, and now she found it difficult to disbelieve those guileless eyes which, for all their embarrassment and distress, met hers so frankly. If the girl had meant to betray them, surely she would not have gone as she had done at once to her cousin ? Once more the Duchess decided to trust her own heart.

“ It was you who defended me when others spoke ill of me,” she said, watching the girl. “ Now, indeed, you have my honour in your keeping.”

Ann fell on her knees beside the couch, kissing the hand the Duchess had held out to her. “ He loves you, Madame, I love you too, your dear honour is safe with me.”

“ Ah ! ” said Madame softly, that quick ‘ He loves you ’ gave her the key to the transparent heart

before her, and drawing the girl to her she kissed her cheek. "Alas! Ann, if you knew what it means to be a princess, always to be watched, spied upon, to have so few you dare trust; to fear lest those most faithful incur the displeasure of the powerful and are reft from you; to bring trouble on those who serve us, I think sometimes that is the curse of our house."

The Duchess's voice broke for a moment and she put her fingers over her eyes. Madame Desbourdes rose swiftly and came to her, laying a cool hand on her forehead, "Madame must not fatigue herself," she murmured anxiously, but Henriette recovered instantly and smiled up at her faithful attendant with a quick word of reassurance. Then, as with a none too friendly glance at Ann, Desbourdes returned to her seat, the Duchess went on quickly:

"I had never had any child to play with until Simon came; he was such a lonely little stranger that even though he was Scottish, Maman was sorry for him. She was grateful, too, for what his father had done for Charles and so she kept him with us, and then next year Henry came—my brother Gloucester. We were very happy, we three, though Henry, who was older, used to laugh sometimes at our games. He would have left me out at times because I was only a little girl, but Simon would not permit it. He was very tall and strong for his age, and always, from the very beginning, I think, he loved me. Anne was his secret name for me and I was his Princess. You can believe I liked that, for I was not a very real princess to anyone else in those days; I was only the daughter of a pensioner of France and sister of a king without a kingdom. The Queen Mother was always kind to us; indeed, she would have been glad for Louis to marry me, for she never forgot that Maman was a daughter of France; but Louis was in love with a grown woman, he thought of me but as a child, and would not even dance with me, ah! Yes, it hurts to be thought a child!" She nodded with whimsical sympathy at the girl before her. It was good to remember those old times in which troubles

were mostly imaginary. Alas ! They had not lasted long, those happy times ; the Queen's efforts to convert the Duke of Gloucester to Catholicism had ended in an irreconcilable breach, the King, already an exile in Holland, had sent for his brother, and with the Duke had gone Simon Kelston.

"I wept, I remember, and begged that Simon might stay," Madame told her eager listener, "but Maman thought he abetted Henry, and she always hated the Scots, and so he was sent away. But he came back sometimes with Charles, who had taken him into his own household, and always he was the same." Madame broke off to ask suddenly, "Why did you hide yourself in that tree at all ?"

Ann's ready flush sprang up once more. "I thought he was in love with Mademoiselle de Kéroualle," she murmured confusedly. "I was very wicked, I could not bear that he should love her and I was ashamed that I should mind if he were happy. I wanted to think it all out."

A faint colour had risen in Madame's pale cheek and, dying, left her whiter than ever. Simon in love with Louise ? Perhaps across her mind flitted the thought of La Vallière, another of her maids whom Louis of France had courted under the very cloak of her own friendship, not that in her heart she suspected Simon. "Simon in love with Louise !"

"Oh, but it was only a foolish mistake ; the moment I saw him with—with your Highness I knew that it was not he I had seen with Mademoiselle de Kéroualle, but only some one like him——" Ann stopped. For the first time since her mistake she realised who, as it was not Simon, the other philanderer must be.

Once more Madame's brows rose, this time in gentle recognition of a fact that she, too, could not but appreciate. This was neither the time nor company in which to comment, however, and instead :

"You have known Mr Kelston only since your coming to Court, yet he is, is he not, your cousin ?"

Ann, very grateful to be thus rescued from her own

false step, plunged hastily into an account of the relationship. Their grandmothers had been sisters, but, their grandfathers having quarrelled at the time of the Bishops' War, the families had long been unknown to each other. "Mr Kelston's grandfather was very deep in the Covenant, on which side he fought," she explained.

"It is strange to think that any kinsman of Simon Kelston should have fought against the King, my father. Now it is only the canaille—the what you would call 'rabble?'—who are disloyal, is it not so?"

Ann hesitated, her truth-loving soul in revolt. "The people, even our west country folk, are not really disloyal," she ventured, "but there are still many everywhere who hate the bishops, and indeed with us the people suffer greatly."

"Poor souls," Madame's heart was always easily touched. "I would they could have our good Bossuet, or my poor friend M. de Vallence, no one could hate such good bishops." She held out her hand, for Madame Desbourdes had once more risen and was approaching with a little glass of cordial. "You will tell me more another time," Madame said sweetly, and as Ann stooped to kiss her fingers, "and always I will trust you," she whispered.

As she murmured fervent assurance of her faithfulness Ann was once again startled by the drawn whiteness of Madame's face, as she sank back exhausted among her cushions.

For the few days that remained Madame, with her sister-in-law's permission, kept Ann much about her, and for this reason she was present when on the eve of her departure the famous scene of the giving of the jewels took place.

In after life Ann never quite forgave her old friend, Gilbert Burnet, for that in his history he so misrepresented this incident.

Charles had given his sister a farewell present, an exquisite set of ornaments, and she, delighted with his gift, longed for something worthy of his accept-

ance. So eager and intent was she upon her thought that she did not see Charles's mischievous glance, as with quick sidelong look at Mademoiselle de K roualle, he told his sister she might give him one of her 'jewels' in return.

"Why, the best I have!" she cried. "Fetch my case, Louise; vite, mon enfante, here is the key."

Louise de K roualle, her eyes on the ground, the faintest tinge of colour in her pale childish face, took the key, curtsied and withdrew, well aware of the black wicked eyes smiling at her. Ann saw them too, and instinctively her own sought Simon's. He stood behind the King, a dog as usual in his arms, his cheek resting on its smooth brown head. There was a slight frown between his brows; from where he stood he could not have seen the King, but his eyes rested on Madame's face with an expression that seemed to Ann at once watchful and solicitous.

Mademoiselle de K roualle returned, and kneeling, presented the casket she carried to the royal pair. Taking a second key from the chain she wore, Madame opened it and presented its contents to her brother. "It is yours, sir, choose what you will," she cried gaily. He too laughed, but he did not look into the box; instead, he put his fingers gently under the chin of the kneeling girl and raised her face. "Why, Minette," he said, half in earnest, half mocking, "here is your finest jewel; leave her, I pray, and we shall take good care of her in England."

There was a hardly perceptible pause. Madame was still smiling and her voice showed no sign of her surprise when she spoke again; yet in that instant her eyes had glanced swiftly past the King lounging on the couch beside her, to the tall figure behind him, a glance of question and alarm it seemed to Ann who alone of the attendants noticed the faint answering shake of the black curls. Then, "Put the casket down, Louise; you may retire. We will look out a jewel for his Majesty ourselves." And as the girl slipped from the King's hand Madame caught his fingers in her own and raised them to her lips.

“No, my Charles, the child is of France and not meant to thrive in our England; her parents gave her to my charge and to them I must return her. As the King’s under-lip protruded in a sulky pout she leaned forward, her hand on his knee, bringing all her own fascination to bear upon this brother, who loved her more truly than he loved any other creature; nor did she relinquish her intent until she had, for the time at least, made him forget his fell suggestion.

The following morning Madame sailed once more for France, bearing Louise de K roualle with her; though there be those to this day who repeat the foul slander that she had brought the girl for no other purpose than to fascinate the King.

“Sighs will not let us half our sorrow tell,
Fair lovely guest and best of nymphs, farewell.”

It was with these verses that the courtly Waller expressed the sentiments of all who watched the Princess step on board that fair June morning. For, as through tears they saw the squadron fade into the distance, their unfeigned regrets followed her, while she, in turn, leant waving her farewell to her beloved land long after all but the white cliffs had vanished.

Only for a moment, when the last parting with Charles had come, had her courage failed her, and clinging to him, she had begged him to allow her to stay in England; but long before Calais was reached, she was herself again, gallantly facing her destiny.

Next day the English Court returned to Whitehall, and a fortnight later the blow fell which was to change the lives of more than one of that gay company.

CHAPTER XI

TOWARDS the end of June the heat was excessive, the parks and gardens about Whitehall were burnt and drooping, and even in the shade of the tennis court

the ladies behind the dedans fanned themselves and wondered amazedly how the gentlemen had the energy to play.

"It is the King his doing," Sir Cuthbert told Ann as they watched Charles and Mr Kelston, who at the moment were engaged in a sharply contested match against the Duke of York and Captain Cooke, the master of the tennis court. "Bab May saith his restlessness is beyond all bearing; he hath nigh killed them since he came from Dover, even Mr Kelston is a-weary."

Ann looked anxiously at Simon. He had just returned a ball with a beautiful back-handed volley, which had called forth a murmur of admiration from the ever appreciative Cuthbert and a spluttered oath from his Grace of York, who had failed to take it, and even her sympathetic scrutiny failed to detect any particular signs of exhaustion. But the King, she thought, had aged of late, his mouth hung more loosely, and the sardonic, discontented lines of his dark face were more in evidence.

Ann loved to watch tennis, not that she really grasped the intricacies of the game, though, thanks to Cuthbert's unceasing instruction, she could at last tell the difference between the dedans and grille, the chase lines and service court, and even follow the score with some intelligence, as it was intoned by Robert Long, the King's marker. But, chiefly it must be owned, she liked the view of Simon's cropped brown hair and the strength and agility which lawn shirt and tennis breeches showed off to even better advantage than did his ordinary habiliments.

"Bab tells me too that the Castlemaine be altogether out of favour, and that though Miss Nell's boy is a fine child, the King has never been near her new house in Pall Mall since he returned."

"I think you talk too much with Mr Baptist May," Ann admonished severely, to which Sir Cuthbert replied with sulky sarcasm that there had been precious few people to talk to when all the fine folk were at Dover. "I went to the play pretty often,

but even that was mighty dull when you were away," he began again presently, for Cuthbert's sulking seldom lasted. He edged a trifle nearer and she, still answering nothing he touched her hand, glancing side-long at her to see whether he might go further, for Ann was apt to head off his sentimental flights with all too ready raillery. Now to his surprise he saw that she had not heard him at all; she was not even looking at the players, but with wide-open eyes that yet looked curiously sightless gazed at the main-wall of the court.

"What is it?" he asked, startled. His pressure on her hand tightened and he felt the tremor that shook her.

"Oh," she breathed, and in a voice hardly audible, "I—you were talking about Dover, I think it must have been that; I was thinking about Madame of course, I—oh! I think it is the heat." She ended abruptly and added as if to herself, "It was only for an instant, it is gone again."

"What is it? What do you mean?" he asked again; but she only shook her head, and replied more quietly, "The heat dazzled my eyes; pray, sir, let us go into the garden."

He would, she thought, fancy her a fit inmate for Bedlam were she to tell him that for a moment, clear against the smooth black wall, she had seemed to see Madame herself, white-robed and beautiful as she had seen her at Dover two short weeks before—more beautiful indeed, for the lines of pain were gone, and her face no longer looked sad and strained but youthful and eager; and even as she gazed, awed and wondering, Madame had stretched her hands to the unconscious players with a little, pitying gesture. Then Cuthbert's voice had broken in, and there was only the blank wall and the King throwing his racquet in the air and catching it again, for that he had won another set.

Ann rose unsteadily, and Cuthbert drew her hand through his arm with anxious care; he was really alarmed about her now. But before they reached the

garden door two men brushed past them into the court. One was my Lord Arlington. Even in that moment of awful suspense Ann found herself wondering for the thousandth time why he always decorated his nose with that strip of black plaster, while, with the same detachment, she noted how more than usually conspicuous it looked to-day against the ashy pallor of his face.

Behind him came a young man booted and cloaked, haggard and dusty from hard riding.

Cuthbert, always agog for news, stopped, as indeed he could hardly have helped doing, for Ann's clutch on his arm was like a vice and she was trembling and broken. It seemed to her afterwards that she had known, before a word was spoken, what news had come.

They saw the King turn, heard as in a dream my lord's urgent voice, as handing Charles a letter he begged him to withdraw to some more private place, pointing at the same time to the messenger. They heard Charles's impatient demand for news, saw the young man kneel, his face buried in his hands, then from the King a cry rang out, unbelieving, terrible.

"Dead! My God—poisoned?"

The next instant Simon caught his master by the arm and half-led, half-dragged him into his dressing-room; the Duke, Arlington, and the messenger followed, and a deathly quiet reigned in the deserted court where those who remained looked wonderingly at each other.

"That," said Sir Cuthbert when he had seated Ann in the shade of a tree, "is Tom Armstrong; he has been in Paris with Mr Ralph Montague, the Ambassador. He must have brought tidings; who, think you, is dead?"

"Madame is dead," Ann said quietly, so quietly that Cuthbert looked at her in surprise. She felt strangely calm, as if the news had long been known to her, yet her whole heart was crying out at its cruelty; and then, without warning, she buried her face in her hands and wept as if her heart would

break, while he, poor fellow, with his arms about her, tried to comfort her with foolish words of love.

Inside the dressing-room Charles paced like some caged and wounded beast; he could not see to read the letter that Ralph Montague, his Ambassador, had penned in such haste and grief, and Arlington had to read it to him he, alternating between passionate bursts of weeping and loud denunciations of Monsieur and all the French Court, while James, on his knees, prayed for his sister's soul, and Simon Kelston stood stiffly by the doorway and showed no sign of the despair that was eating his heart.

On their first entering, and while Charles still clung blindly to Kelston, James had plucked at his brother's sleeve, whispering with a lowering glance that this was surely a matter for the family alone; but the King had silenced him savagely with a reminder that family exclusiveness sat ill on one who had himself married a commoner. "And, would to God, Minette had followed your example, that we might have had her with us yet," he had added, with a fresh burst of grief. So James had betaken him to his prayers and Simon remained, with a face set stonily and a soul on which a flaming pencil burned sentence after sentence till all his being was seared with the fire of hell.

"Madame, on Sunday the 29th of this inst: . . . about 5 o'clock in the afternoon called for a glass of chicory water . . . she had no sooner drunk this, but she cried out she was dead . . . she continued in the greatest tortures imaginable till 3 o'clock in the morning, when she died. Madame declared she had no reluctancy to die, but for the grief she thought it would be to the King her brother. Never anybody died with that piety and resolution, and kept her senses to the last."

"She had M. Bossuet, the Bishop of Condom, with her, sir," Sir Thomas Armstrong told the King; "even in her pain she remembered a ring she had ordered for him, and in English, that he might not be dis-

tressed, begged her maid to give it to him when she was dead; her thought was ever for others, but especially of your Majesty," and with a voice breaking with emotion he repeated the many tender messages the dying woman had sent through his Ambassador to the brother she had 'always loved better than life.'

He told, too, of that first tragic cry, 'I am poisoned,' but of how, on Montague's arrival, when he had pressed her to say if this was indeed her belief, the priest, catching the word, had stopped her with a stern, "Madame, you must accuse no one, but offer your life a sacrifice to God," and how after that she would say nothing but that she at first had believed herself 'poisoned by mistake.' The chicory water, he explained, had been mixed by her own most devoted attendant, who had herself afterwards drunk from the glass with no ill effect.

Charles, the first wild spasm of grief abated, listened more calmly.

"She recommended to your help all her poor servants, and especially desired that you will always, for her sake, love those who have loved her; this she repeated to Mr Montague in English with great earnestness, saying that your Majesty would understand."

Charles raised his red and swollen lids and let his eyes rest for a moment upon the still figure at the door; but even as he did so, it swayed and pitched forward in a crumpled heap at his feet. The breaking-point had come.

Only for a moment did the bliss of unconsciousness remain with Kelston. "The heat, sir, I overstrained in that last set." The instinct of years to cover Madame's name brought the lie to his lips almost before his eyes reopened, and with the assistance of Armstrong he had struggled to his feet. The King smiled faintly. "Best go and lie down, Sim," he said good-naturedly. "We can do nothing now but wait further news. Monsieur is a villain, Sir Thomas, but for the present let no word of our suspicion pass

your lips, I beg of you. We must act warily. My Lord Arlington, your arm."

"Poor bairn, the poor, poor bairn." David Gourlay had repeated the words a hundred times that evening, as he wandered in and out of his master's rooms on little aimless errands; but whether his thoughts were with the young Princess, already coffined for her burial, or for his master, even he himself perhaps hardly knew.

The palace was strangely quiet; those whose business carried them through the passages and galleries walked lightly with bent heads and downcast eyes, as if they were in death's actual presence; even among the servants the reality of mourning prevailed, for not one of those who had accompanied their masters to Dover but had come home with some tale of Madame's kindliness or generosity, and the tragic mystery of her sudden death had fallen like a personal weight upon each. Outside the palace, in the city, where the news had already spread like wildfire, the effect was very different; all the smouldering hatred of the French kindled and shot up into rioting and cries for vengeance. Even where he stood in his window looking down the river Simon could have heard the faint, far-off sounds of execration as the mob swarmed about the lodging of the Ambassador *could* have heard, but in reality he heard nothing, saw nothing. A table of food stood untouched behind him, and Davie shook his head as he looked from it to his master. He had stood thus, it seemed to Davie, ever since his coming from the tennis court, his legs a little apart, his hands clasped behind him, staring out at the river with eyes that saw nothing, neither moving nor speaking, his bed unslept on, his food untasted.

"Laddie, laddie, will ye no eat? I've cooked you a neat's tongue and a friar's chicken just the way you like them . . . you are no doing onybody ony good by no eating," Davie grumbled anxiously; but the figure in the window answered nothing, and with another shake

of his white head David ambled back to his own place. Not for long, however, in a few minutes he returned, silently this time. Under his arm he carried a Bible and, crossing to the stool under the reliquary, he laid the Book on it, turning the pages carefully till he found what he wanted.

"Job first and twenty-first," he murmured. "'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Looking up he noticed for the first time that the reliquary lamp had gone out, and his jaw dropped a little as he stood gazing at it.

"'Shall a man make gods unto himself and they are no gods?' " he muttered, awed; and again: "'Because ye have burned incense and because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you as at this day.' Oh, Lord, have mercy on my bairn. Make him not a vessel of Thy wrath, but save him," he wailed, lifting his eyes to heaven; and even as he prayed he became aware that some one knocked at the outer door.

Gourlay glanced over his shoulder at his master, but if he too heard, he gave no sign, so with yet another shake of his head the man went through the outer room and opened the door cautiously. Peering into the darkening passage he saw a woman wrapped in a cloak, and with her hood drawn down.

Gourlay stepped out and closed the door behind him. "Well?" he asked. "Who be you and what want ye?" Then as she lifted her face, "Gude sakes! It is the Mistress Jean!" he whispered.

"No," the girl said, "I am Ann Kennedy; you are Mr Kelston's servant, are you not? I must see him."

"Of course," he said, still looking strangely at her. "Of course, Mistress Jean Douglas is a grown woman long syne and you are but a bairn."

"That was my mother's name," she said surprised. He smiled at her, his blue eyes softening. "You need na tell me that, my dear. You are awful like

her—though I'll no say you are as bonny," he added and brought a smile to her lips, though her face was wae enough.

"I am glad you knew my mother, for now I need not tell you that I am Mr Kelston's cousin, and you will understand that I must see him." David still blocked the door, though he looked very kindly at her. "Another time, Mistress Kennedy, another time, maybe, though I am no saying it's a wise-like thing for a young gentlewoman to be gadding about in these parts alone, even in search of her cousin, but you cannot see him to-day—he is no that weel to-day."

"I know that," she said quietly, "he is in great trouble, that is why I must see him."

Gourlay looked at her, admiring; aye, her eyes too were like the hazel buds. "I daurna," he said, but hesitatingly, and she knew she had won.

"I will take the blame," she pleaded. "If he does not want me I will go away again, but a man needs his own folk when he is in trouble and I am his kinswoman." She moved nearer him and put her hand on the door.

"Ye're as maisterfu' as your mother," Gourlay said, and turned the handle for her. "If you can get the lad to sit down and eat a bit; ech! if ye can even make him angry, ye'll no do much harm," and with that he opened the door and pointed to the room beyond.

The girl passed in. As she reached the second door she hesitated, for at the first glance this room, too, seemed empty and the enormity of her own insistence overwhelmed her, then her shy gaze lighted on the still figure by the window and she caught her breath in quick pity. Something in the hopelessness of the bent shoulders, something so different from their usual self-confident strength, swept from her all thought of self. This was a child hurt to the death and with no understanding of its pain. She had feared Sir Cuthbert should think her mad; she cared not a whit what Simon thought of her so long as she might comfort him. Gourlay saw her move

swiftly across the room and slip her hand through her cousin's arm.

"Cousin Simon," she spoke low, but very distinctly, "I saw Madame yesterday." If she had hoped to startle him out of the dull torpor of his grief she was disappointed; he hardly turned his head, only his lack-lustre eyes moved a little toward the sound of her voice.

"You could not do that, my dear, for she is dead."

"I know," she said, and shook his arm gently, "I know that, Simon; that is why you must listen to me, for it is true that I saw her; you are grieving not for yourself just now but for her, for all she suffered."

"She continued in the greatest tortures imaginable"—'when she was in any ease from the torture she was in,' " he quoted in the same lifeless voice, and then, wrenching his arm from Ann, stood swaying, his hands caught up below his chin, the nails biting into the palms. "She was so exquisite, so frail; all her sweet body racked with torture, and I am here alive, strong—My God, how strong!—and I can do nothing, nothing." Suddenly he turned upon Ann, catching her by the shoulder. He was shaking so that for all his boasted strength he needed her support.

"Listen," he said, speaking very fast. "Charles says we must be wary; Charles is the King of England, and England, for all her shouting, dare not quarrel with France, but—you can keep a secret, Ann Kennedy; you have kept one before—come—" He pulled her after him towards the reliquary. The unaccustomed sight of the Bible gave him pause, then with a harsh laugh, "Why, that's an omen," he said, and put his free hand on the Book. "Listen, I swear it. I will find the man who poisoned her and, if he be the King of France himself, I swear by this Book, he—" "No! No!" she cried, stopping him with a hand over his mouth, "No," as he shook her off, "you must not swear that. Oh, I know what you would say, you will have murder

for murder, hurt for hurt. What good will that do her? Man, man, don't you see it is you are hurting her now?"

"I?" For a moment it seemed she had really got his attention, broken through the stone wall of his grief, and pricked the dream-bubble of his passion, this slip of a girl who hardly reached his shoulder. "I would not hurt a hair of her head," he said dully.

"Sit down," she commanded, as if she spoke to a child, "Sit down, and listen to me."

He sank on to the edge of his bed, his elbow on the carved poster, his head on his hand.

"Why did you say you had seen her?" he asked, but without interest.

"Because it is true," she said earnestly. "At the tennis court before the news came. You may think me mad, but it is true. I saw her as distinctly as I see you now—oh, more distinctly, for I had no tears in my eyes." She gave a little sobbing laugh, sweeping them away with her hand, and went on quickly, for she feared he would interrupt her. "She looked as she did at Dover, yet not the same, for at Dover she looked tired, sad; even that day by the apple tree she was in pain, ill and weary." He winced at that, but she went on steadily. "I think we did not know how much she suffered because of her courage, but yesterday all the pain was gone, she looked young and beautiful; yes, and happy, only she was sorry that you must suffer. She stretched out her hands to comfort you, she was sad because of your unhappiness. Oh, Simon, do you not see that is why you must have courage?"

His gaze had gone past her and fixed itself on the unlighted lamp. He had shown no sign of wonder or unbelief, and she was not even sure that he was listening to her; but as she paused, uncertain how to move him, his look came back to her, and he repeated her last word with an odd childlike seriousness.

"Courage. Yes, I have lacked that. I should have killed her miserable cur of a husband long

ago, but I was afraid—Lord ! not for myself,” he broke off to say, misreading her look of horror, “I would have suffered the wheel a hundred times to save her little finger from pain, but I was afraid for her, afraid the scandal would overreach itself and smirch her ; afraid too of leaving her. As long as I was alive I thought that I could protect her, she liked to know that I existed. Her anchor—O God ! they cut the cable easily enough ; poisoned her, she died in torture, and I did not even know she was dying. Gone out like the lamp yonder—my Anne—my Princess.” The low, dragging voice was more than Ann Kennedy could bear, with a broken cry she dropped on her knees beside the bed. “Oh, dear God, why did you let Madame come to me if I cannot bring him comfort ?” she sobbed pitifully, all her courage melting in this slow, deep burning fire of a grief she felt too young to cope with.

Her tears penetrated what her words had merely played upon—the enfolding egotism of his bereavement. For two days the world had not existed for Kelston ; as one who holds vigil with his dead in some desert place, he had shut himself off from sight and sound of outward things ; even while he talked with Ann he had hardly been conscious of her presence, but now this sound as of a child’s bitter weeping brought him back to his actual surrounding. He had always felt very tender toward little young things, hating to see a child in pain, and now as she knelt beside him, her hood fallen back, her brown curls disorderly, she seemed less even than her sixteen years.

“Do not cry, Cousin Ann,” he said, and laid his hand gently on her bent head, then as with the touch of her came a fuller realisation, “How did you come here, my dear ? Did David let you in ?” He got to his feet slowly, stood looking down at her perplexed and a little troubled. At his touch she lifted her head and made a valiant effort to control her tears as she hastened to keep her promise to Gourlay. “It was not your servant’s fault, I had to come, I made him let me come in.”

"Why?" The question came in sheer surprise, his head was buzzing, and with his renewed consciousness had come an unaccustomed sense of weakness.

Ann's colour flamed but she answered quietly, "I was the only person who knew how much you cared, I thought, perhaps, it might help you to be able to talk of her to—to some one who loved her too. I felt as if she were sending me, and I am your kinswoman." She had risen and stood, her cloak drawn about her, her hands clasped as when she had stood before Madame. Something in her simple dignity, something in the slim grace of her young body brought home to him, that for all her youth, she was no longer a child.

"Thank you, Cousin Ann," he stammered, and wished his head would cease its silly clamouring.

"I will go away now," she went on, inclining her head a little in answer to his thanks. He still stood with one hand resting on the poster; but as she moved he put his other one out and caught her cloak. "Don't go," he said, and there was fear in his voice, fear too in the black-ringed, sunken eyes; a blind unreasoning fear of his own utter desolation had come upon him. He did not want to be left alone with nothing but remembrance for company, to sink again into the bleak horror of an empty world. "Do not go away," he repeated. Once again they had changed places. He, not she, was the child, and the motherhood that is every woman's birthright answered his call.

"If I stay you must do as I bid you," said Mistress Kennedy, and put her hand in his. "David, bring yon chair over by the window," she called, and Gourlay was doing her orders in a twinkling. "Now, 'tis but a step," she said, and having seated him safely in the king's chair, "You will not send me away fasting, Cousin Simon? No, sit still, I would liefer sit on this stool, and maybe David will bring us something here."

"Friar's chicken, I have just cooked it fresh, and maybe a syllabub and—the finest Rhenish, forbye," chuckled Davie, beaming at her. It was useless for

Kelston to explain that he could not eat ; and indeed, when the food came, he found it was not true. As she fed him she made him talk, leading him on by little artless questions to tell her of his first sight of his little princess in the gardens of the Louvre, to the day when, going with the Duke of Gloucester to the English service, they had returned to find his rooms dismantled and to hear the Queen's stern refusal to house a son who would not turn Catholic to her orders. "She was a violent bigot, *la pauvre reine malheureuse*, she would not see him even to say farewell ; but we crept back in the evening to say good-bye to my princess, torn between her loyalties, the poor little one. 'Oh me, my mother ; oh me, my brother,' she wept, loving them both, always since she was a babe she has had a heart for happiness, and others have filled it with sorrows."

"And afterwards you two rode with the Duke of Ormond to Cologne, did you not ? That must have been a strange journey," she said, for she would not have him fall back into his melancholy, and so on till she saw the colour coming back to his face and the strained unnatural fixity gone from his eyes, and when the next moment she found him stifling a yawn she could have wept for joy to know that now she might safely leave him to the best nurse in the world.

But because he was himself again she could not, as she would have wished, slip away as she had come ; he would not hear of her going unattended, he must see her into safe keeping ; and she, being equally firm that he must do no such thing, a compromise had to be come to whereby Gourlay should go to St James's with Mistress Kennedy, and Mr Kelston should lie upon his bed, and if might be sleep until his servant's return.

"My cousin," he said as he kissed her hand, "I have no words to thank you, but believe me I am grateful. I think I was not far from madness and you have saved me."

When she was gone he flung himself down upon his

bed ; he was astonished and not a little ashamed to find how exhausted he felt ; he would lie down for a few minutes as he had promised, but he had many things to see to before—and with that his weary eyes closed, and Gourlay, when he returned, found him sound asleep, so throwing a cloak gently over him, he left him undisturbed.

CHAPTER XII

It was after midnight when Kelston awoke ; he had slept dreamlessly and for a moment wondered to find himself lying dressed upon his bed ; in the next, remembrance with its overwhelming desolation swept sleep from him—"Madame is dead."

Meaning was driven from his life by those three small words, but food and sleep had done their work and he was sane now ; besides, there was work to be done, work that he was beginning to realise only he could do. Rising, he moved silently to the door which Gourlay had left open and shutting it, shot the bolt noiselessly into place, then, opening the chest which stood at the end of the bed, he took from it a smaller box of stamped leather and began systematically to go through its contents, letters and a few documents. The latter he tied into a bundle and sealed. The letters were, for the most part, soon flaming in the empty grate. Some were from young Henry of Gloucester, and over one of these he smiled, for all his aching heart. The Duke was indignant at being left at Cologne when Charles went secretly to Brussels (they had escaped quietly, Simon remembered, for fear of the King's creditors). "If I may not come," young Henry wrote, "pray the King, my Brother, that he bespeak two pairs of Shoes for me, one Black and the other Coloured and bigger than my last ; for here we may get no further credit." A pistole of his own, a present from Lord Hatton before he left France and his whole wealth, had gone, Simon remembered, to the buying of those shoes.

Over another he hesitated longer before committing it too to the flames. It was written faintly, on a leaf torn from a Bible, the same which was still Gourlay's most dear possession. Many a time had Simon listened awestruck as Gourlay told of that scene by the Sidbury Gate, when his father, taking advantage of an overturned waggon, had made a last desperate stand to cover the King's retreat, till wounded to the death, he had been dragged into shelter by the faithful Gourlay, there to pen his farewell message to the little boy, so soon to be the last of his line and name :

"MY SONNE,—I pray God Almighty have thee in His Keeping. Serve Him and love Him with thy Hart and forget not thy Duty is to the King. Farewell," and then hardly legible followed the words, "To my Littel Sonne."

One letter only remained thrust in carelessly and hardly to be paused over, yet as he held it to the flame, and ere it caught, he drew it back quickly and glanced again at the signature.

It was a note of thanks written in acknowledgment of a service rendered to the Italian Abbé Pregnani, who in the previous year had been sent by the King of France to act as a secret agent under cover of his powers as an astrologer and caster of horoscopes. He had found, the poor Abbé, that the sport-loving, cynical King was more ready to laugh at him because of his failure to win money at horse-matches than to give credence to his magical powers, or even make use of his services. He had been rather ridiculously grateful, therefore, for a 'tip' thrown to him by Kelston's careless good-nature.

'Nay, then, I know not how I came to keep this, yet mayhap now it may be of use,' Simon thought, and threw it on to the table.

Then turning to the reliquary he took out the miniature ; with it were a few relics of youth, a faded flower, a bit of white ribbon, a little formal letter that he knew by heart, and a red gold curl of hair. This last he twisted lingeringly over his finger, and finally placed beside the miniature. The rest he carried to

the fire and kneeling, laid them in its heart. Then taking the miniature and the curl he put them together in a small package, wrote a line or two, and sealing it carefully, addressed it: "To my cousin, Mistress Ann Kennedy." Finally, he sat down and began somewhat laboriously to write: "I, Simon Kelston of Kells, in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, Being in my right mind, do will and bequeath——" He got no further, for the click of the private door made him turn quickly and spring to his feet, as Charles came in.

"Not abed, Sim? I could not sleep either." The King crossed the room and threw himself wearily into the chair Simon had moved for him; he wore a long loose gown, and without his wig he looked grey and haggard.

"More news has come, there will be a very particular examination of her body." Kelston's hands, clasped behind him, tightened until the knuckles showed white, but he gave no other sign, and Charles talked on. "The rumour of poison grows, but they will deny it if they can. I know not what to think. Monsieur is the veriest scoundrel and has treated her shamefully; but that he should resort to this is the most unbelievable thing in the world."

He got up and began to pace up and down, talking in short, jerky sentences. His grief had abated somewhat but he was sorely troubled.

"I have told Colbert that I will not read Monsieur's letter. I have spoken to him strongly of the way Madame has been treated since her return. But I cannot quarrel with Louis. Indeed, Colbert assures me his Majesty's grief is as great as my own. The doctors talk of a 'Colique Bilieuse.' They may find nothing; yet Montague clearly believes her poisoned. I do not know what to think." He flung himself back into his chair, playing a tattoo upon its arms with restless fingers as he stared gloomily in front of him. "If they have really murdered her, if the crime is proved, his Most Christian Majesty cannot allow the culprit to go unpunished." His tone had in

it a note almost of entreaty; he did not look at Kelston.

"And if his Most Christian Majesty assures you that no crime took place, you, Sir, must accept his word—unless you are prepared to break with France."

"To break with France would mean the undoing of all Minette was so proud to have brought about," Charles pleaded, and this time he raised heavy lids and looked at the young man before him; he saw the veiled contempt fade and the hard lines soften at the name.

"That must never be." Simon came nearer and leant on the back of the King's chair, looking down at him. "Madame's murderers cannot go unpunished, Charles; but the punishment is not in your hands; nor, if the crime be tracked high enough, can his Most Christian Majesty do all that he might wish."

"He is sending over M. le Maréchal de Bellefonds; he was with Madame when she died," Charles muttered. "I must hear him."

"Doubtless he will reassure your mind, sir—in any case, you cannot break with France."

Charles half-turned in his chair and looked up. For a moment the two pairs of eyes met in silent interchange of question and answer. In the uncertain light of the summer dawn both faces were strangely secret. Then the King's eyelids dropped again, and he put his hand over his eyes.

"If I were a private person I would strangle him with my own hands, but I must think of the country," Charles whispered. "Even if I were to let another act for me Louis would never forgive it."

Simon had moved towards the window. "Most assuredly you could give no countenance to such an attempt," he said. Then, with hardly a pause, "Sir, you will pardon a personal matter? I have a favour to ask. I am ill and would go—north. A man's native air is said to put new life into him, and if there be those who would question, seeing how mighty strong I have always been, why, my Lord Arlington and Tom Armstrong are there to vouch for it that I swooned

two days since at the tennis court. A man does not behave thus foolishly unless he is ailing, and no one has seen me since. I regret to leave your Majesty at such a time of sorrow, but you have many to serve you and can spare a sick man. I have never asked a favour before, Charles." His voice changed a little, losing its impersonal note, but Charles shook his head.

"No, no, Simon." He got up restlessly, and stood picking at the back of the chair, his brows together. "Even if you succeeded you would never come back alive."

"Why, sir, Scotland is a vile spot, as I have heard your Majesty say; always too there is the journey on which accidents have happened. It might well be that one might disappear on the road, I was even now taking the precaution of making a will. What of it? A man must die some time. Your Majesty will give me permission. For the rest, you are in no way accountable."

The King did not answer. Instead he looked past Simon eastward down the river, where the first streak of light was broadening to pale gold.

"We Stuarts are an unlucky race. God help us! Must we always be sending some good servant to his death?"

"Nay, to regain his life. I thank you, Sir," said Simon Kelston, and he knelt and kissed the King's hand. But Charles shivered and wrapped his gown more closely about him as the fresh breath of morning stirred the papers on the table, and from the water below the voice of a river watchman came up shrilly: "Four o'clock, and a fine morning."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

MADAME DESBOURDES stood by the long window looking out over the garden to the Seine. A beautiful prospect lay before her, the scent of carefully tended flowers filled the sunlit air ; but to Desbourdes the garden was as a desert, and she shivered as she turned back once more and addressed her companion who, sitting on one of the tall gilt chairs, watched her somewhat anxiously.

"I myself mixed the chicory water, afterwards I drank of it." She wrung her hands in her effort to be calm. "It is dreadful to me to be still alive."

Madame Lafayette rose and laid a consoling hand upon her arm. "Mon amie, I assure you no one could dream of blaming you ; all who knew our dear Princess knew also your devotion to her. For my own part," she went on, "I am more and more coming to the belief that the doctors are, for once, correct and that no poison was used. I"—she lowered her voice and spoke into her friend's ear—"watched Monsieur with the greatest care when she first cried out that she was poisoned ; but not for one moment had he the air of one guilty or even embarrassed ; he is a fool and a knave, but I cannot think he is capable of so great a crime."

"Ah ! If I could but believe you how terrible a load would be taken from my mind, though my heart must ever go empty," cried the distracted gentlewoman.

Madame Lafayette led her to a couch and seated herself beside her. Mimi, the Duchess's little spaniel, looked up from the cushion on which she lay and whined miserably. "Think back, chère amie. For

months our dear one has been ailing : the shock of her mother's death coming so soon after the birth of the little Mademoiselle de Valois, her journey to England, all she has gone through since her return tried her greatly. That last day of her life, you remember, when she lay down to rest after dinner, I sat with her, her dear head rested upon my knees. She slept ; I was shocked then by the change in her appearance and tried to think it was but that she slept, yet all the while I knew that I had often before seen her in repose yet never thus, so worn, so deathlike ; even Monsieur, careless as he is, was alarmed and spoke of it. May it not be that after all, tragic though her death must be to all who loved her, it is not the dread and horrid thing we are depicting it ? ”

“ That is what M. Valot, the King's physician, declares,” Madame Desbourdes answered more calmly, “ He repeats always that her death is less surprising than that, with her precarious health, she lived so long ; yet, that at first she believed herself poisoned I feel certain, for all her sweet resignation and her obedience to the commands of M. Feuillet that she should accuse no one. The Jansenists are very stern ; I was glad when M. de Condom came.”

“ Yes, M. Feuillet is severe, yet Madame desired him,” Madame Lafayette said quickly, for she had herself sent at Madame's request for the Jansenist priest. “ She always admired him ; how often I have heard her laugh over his answer to Monsieur when that foolish man would know whether or not he might eat an orange in Lent. ‘ Eat an ox, Monsieur, but pay your debts and lead a Christian life.’ She loved his good sense, and hard though he seemed, he has spoken since in wonder of her beautiful humility and serenity. Was it not strange that that very day, in sympathy for a trifling accident which had lately befallen me, she spoke of death ? ‘ It might have killed you,’ she exclaimed, ‘ would you have been afraid to die ? ’ and then with a sigh, ‘ as for me, I do not think I should be afraid of death,’—strange for one so young and beautiful.”

She stopped and put up a warning hand. Through the opposite window, which looked out upon the courtyard where the pages had their apartments, came the notes of a fiddle playing a light French tune such as villagers might dance to at a fair; it stopped as abruptly as it had begun and was followed by a burst of laughter. Madame Desbourdes rose angrily and went to the window; as she appeared the music began once more, but this time the tune was different, a strange sad air. Madame Desbourdes had clapped her hands together for silence. She paused now a moment before calling "Jean, René." Instantly the music ceased. "Who so forgets himself in this house of mourning?" she demanded of the flustered pages who answered her summons.

"Pardon, Madame, it is but a gypsy fellow who will not go away," the older of the two boys answered meekly.

"And are there not lackeys strong enough to send him about his business?"

Desbourdes was scornful, but Madame Lafayette laid a hand once more upon her arm. "Suppose you see him yourself first," she said in a low voice, "these gypsies are queer fellows."

"He says he can read fortunes; indeed, he has told us many strange things," Jean said apologetically.

Madame Desbourdes looked quickly at her friend. She was struck with a curious expression on that lady's delicate face, and as she hesitated, the little haunting tune began again very softly. Madame Lafayette nodded. "Strange fellows," she repeated, adding, "it can do no harm. No music of course, but a ballad or some old tale would pass an hour and soothe your sadness, maybe. At least hear what he has to say for himself. Send him up, Jean." She smiled at the page, who, glad to get off so easily, scurried away. "If you find him of interest send him to me in Paris. I will leave you now, for if I am right he will wish to see you alone."

"You think——?"

"Oh, who knows?" Madame Lafayette said with

a shrug, and slipped away as a man with a fiddle beneath his arm stepped in at the open window. He was a tall man, with a tanned face and a small up-curling beard. His shaggy eyebrows almost met, giving him an appearance of sternness, yet he walked jauntily and his shabby clothes were fantastic in their cut. As he bowed to the ground Madame signed to the pages to withdraw. "Who let you in, Monsieur Fiddler?" she asked. "Did they not tell you that this house is one of mourning, its mistress lying still unburied?"

"Children have short memories, Madame. I came but to earn a few sous from the little messieurs down there—I pray you, Madame, call off your dog." He stepped back as he spoke, for at the sound of the strange voice the spaniel had awaked with a sharp, angry bark and made a rush at the intruder. "Down, Mimi," the lady called, but the little animal took no notice; it had reached its prey, but instead of snapping its anger changed suddenly to something not unlike ecstasy; it circled about the fiddler, whining and wagging its tail, gazing up at him as if it would ask, "Where is she? Where is she?"

"Sir," said Madame Desbourdes in a low voice, "I think you are not what you seem; what is your will in this strange guise—that tune?"

He stooped and picked up the little dog, holding it against his cheek. He was trembling, and for a moment as he buried his face in its glossy coat and kissed the long silken ears, he could not speak; then, still holding the spaniel, he turned to the lady-in-waiting. There was no pretence now as he spoke in quick, sharp sentences.

"There are things I must know. I need your help, but the tale is too long for here. The stone summer-house by the acacia path two hours from now; will you come?"

"I know very little; nay, I know nothing at all," she stammered in fear; but he swept aside the irrelevant excuse with three words that were a command, "For her sake."

Madame Desbourdes bowed her head. "I will come," she said.

He kissed the dog's silken head and put her back upon her cushion. "No, Mimi, down, quiet, my little one," then "Good! Have me put out now," And once more the gypsy, "Ah, Madame does not believe in horoscopes? She will not trust the art of the poor Egyptian? I can only ask Madame's pardon for this intrusion; but indeed I meant no harm." He had backed to the window, and now bowed low once more.

Madame Desbourdes was no actress but she succeeded in controlling her voice to cry, "Jean, have this fellow seen to the door; give him a livre, but see he plays no more, and waste no time."

Two hours later the gypsy stood in the shadow of the summer-house. Desbourdes, a dark scarf about her head, sat between him and the door, a book in her lap; it was the hour of siesta, and everything was very still.

"He is the brother of the King," she was saying, and her voice was full of fear.

"If he be the King himself, I care not if it be proved that he killed her; but I would not act rashly, that is why I come to you now."

"I do not think he did it," she whispered. "Here it is the Chevalier who is suspected."

"I know," he answered quickly, "but it was not Lorraine. I too believed he was responsible. I was told Morel had brought the poison for him from Italy, and I have spent much time of late with Morel. He is a clever rogue, but interested in the occult, and I remembered his weakness for love philtres. Last night I gave him one which made him boastfully drunk. I complimented him on his success in Madame's death; he would have claimed it if he could, but in confidence he assured me it was not true. Lorraine had sent no poison; D'Effiat, Beuvron, and the rest are as mystified as any. It was not that they would not have done it, but rather that they dared not."

"You are sure he spoke the truth?"

"I believe so. Looking upon me as a villain as great as himself, he would, I think, have been glad to boast that he was accessory to her death. Besides, I tested him later; carrying him to the well behind the inn and holding him by his heels I threatened him, but even then he could but corroborate his former tale."

"What, then, do you want of me?" Desbourdes asked helplessly.

"Everything you know, everything you suspect, afterwards certain information anent Philippe d'Orleans his habits."

She told him all she knew, all too that Madame Lafayette had added. "She was here. 'Twas she bade me see you; she knew you, I think."

He nodded absently. "Yes, she, too, knows Madame's tune."

Madame Desbourdes hated Monsieur, as indeed which of Madame's devotees did not? Yet, that he had poisoned her mistress, the more so if he had done it without the aid of his rascally crew of favourites, she found it difficult to believe.

"How could he?" she asked.

"That we must discover."

At that she cried out, "But how? How?" To which he would but answer with a shrug of his shoulders, he must have access to Monsieur before he could tell her further. But, again, she had only discouragement; Monsieur was no longer at St Cloud, he had gone to St Germain.

"To the King?" The gypsy whistled; that was bad news indeed, nevertheless, it daunted him but for the moment. One question more he asked her. "What did Madame herself believe?"

"I do not know. At first she cried out that she was poisoned; later, to the Bishop of Condom, she said only that 'at first' she had believed herself poisoned. There is only one man in France can tell you more, that is Feuillet the Jansenist, who confessed her; he is a hard man but just; see him, Monsieur Kelston."

"Later," he said, "but first, Monsieur." Beyond

that he would promise nothing. She could not dissuade him from his pursuit of justice, perhaps she hardly wished to ; she could only weep and wring her hands, yet she told him all she could of the Château of St Germain, and, for her own sake as well as his, he knew she would not betray him.

CHAPTER II

“THUS and thus,” said the Abbé Pregnani, moving his hands to and fro in slow rhythmic passes ; “ Monsieur is indeed an apt pupil. I could not have believed anyone with so little practice could have put my servant into the mystic sleep. You will, however, remember my warning, for the art is not one to be lightly practised ; and to no other would I have revealed it. To you it was a debt of honour, M. Kelston, for I can never forget your kindness to me in, pardon me, your barbaric England.”

Kelston laughed, once again profuse in his thanks to the master. The handsome purse of gold which had already passed from his hands to the Abbé’s was ignored by both in this interchange of compliment and gratitude.

One more favour Kelston desired from his host. “ You have a door into the lane behind, have you not ? As I have explained to you, the success of the bet is its secrecy ; if my opponent were to guess I had come to you for help—you understand ? ”

“ Quite, quite, by all means go by the back. If any one asks for you, I am as the grave. No one has visited me but a German student ! Ah, you English ! you would bet above the death-beds of your parents, or with Satan for their souls, I do believe. *Sacré !* But for the request of poor Madame, nothing would have induced me to visit your country. But you, Monsieur, you are always welcome. No, there is no one in the lane ; and indeed, with that beard you are most changed. Again my felicitations, monsieur, and farewell.”

Some hours later a clean-shaven elderly man, dressed in a rich though sombre attire under a heavy travelling cloak, left the sign of the Galliard Bois in the Rue Forsoyeur, passing through the bowling-green door to the less frequented Rue Feron, and walked quickly away. He was thin and somewhat bent, and in no way resembled the Abbe Pragnani's late pupil, unless it were in his evident preference for quiet roads.

In the kitchen of the Inn the hostess had just thrown a package on the fire and was holding her nose as it burned. "It is an old periwig of horsehair," she explained, when her husband cried out against the smell. "The moths were in it and it was best destroyed; yes, truly, lavender and rose leaves have the pleasanter perfume, but we must keep the place tidy, the fire is the best place for such rubbish, and—M. Simon is an excellent customer." And she grinned at her man, who grunted, but asked no further questions, having a great faith in his wife's management.

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Philippe d'Orleans turned from his mirror with a sigh. Certainly those purple robes suited him very well; but what did it matter if there was no one to admire, no one, that was to say, for whose opinion he really cared? He was tired of D'Effiat, bored with Beuvron, and his Most Christian Majesty was as adamant as ever about the Chevalier's return. Madame would have laughed at him possibly, such was her irritating way, yet she would have owned that he looked handsome; she had always, he must admit, been ready to praise his appearance, and her taste was to be trusted. He had half put out his hand to touch his gold bell and bid his page summon her, when he remembered that it was for Madame herself he wore these very mourning robes. Good heavens! He must be losing his reason, grief was certainly very bad for him; he had not thought to miss Madame, but undoubtedly he needed a wife. He felt very sorry for himself, but in an instant his sorrow was swallowed up by terror. Behind him,

entered he knew not how, stood a tall, cloaked figure, finger on lip.

For a moment Philippe was too terrified to move or cry out, and before he could make up his mind what to do the apparition spoke.

"Hush! Monsieur, I pray you call no one. I bear a secret message from the Chevalier Lorraine."

"You are not his usual messenger," stammered Philippe, fingering his dagger.

"No, but I bear his ring; the strange and awful happenings of these last weeks necessitated a messenger more swift and secret than Morel or his kind."

"How did you get here?" Monsieur's attitude had relaxed somewhat, but he was still wary. Again the stranger put his finger on his lips.

"Hush! Hush! I pray your Royal Highness. I come, who knows? I go. The door is barred, yet I am here. Let us not enquire too closely." He spoke in low hollow tones. He seemed to Monsieur's agitated vision of more than earthly height, and above his black cloak his face gleamed unnaturally white. In spite of himself Philippe was awed; he sank back into his chair without further protest as the monotonous voice talked on.

"As long as Madame's presence pervaded your house it was impossible for the agents of the Great Power to come about you; but now that she has been successfully—removed?" The stranger hesitated, as if questioning.

"Removed?" Philippe whispered, horror-struck; "was she indeed 'removed'?" The other shrugged impatiently, answering question by question. "How else did she die so suddenly and in torment?"

"It is true that she thought herself poisoned," Philippe said slowly, "but we did not believe it. The doctors declared her death to be natural. I myself drank of the same glass——"

"*You drank of it?*" The messenger had suddenly become alert, his erstwhile expressionless face was full of concern. "*You drank of it?*" he repeated in a

voice so full of terror that Philippe cried out startled : " Why not ? No harm has come of it, nothing can happen now ? " The other only covered his face, shaking his head and muttering, " Alas, poor Lorraine, he will suffer terribly, his distress will be unbearable."

" But what do you mean ? Why do you talk in this foolish way ? Madame died a month ago, nay, more, and I have felt no ill effects, even if it is true that she was poisoned. I could not suffer now."

" *If* she were poisoned, ah, Highness, do you doubt it ? And, alas ! this is the most dread effect of this poison. The first partaker dies in torment, but quickly ; for the second, death is lingering, a slow agony protracted while any remnant of life is left to the unfortunate sufferer." Then leaning forward he asked in the same tones of distress. " Your Royal Highness professes to have felt no ill, but is this true ? Have you had no sickness, no loss of memory ? Has no warning come to you ? "

" *Sacré Bleu !* Even now I forgot that she was dead ! Three days ago I was sick after the banquet to the Polish envoys." Then, as further realisation of the stranger's words penetrated his mind, " but this is horrible, it cannot be. There must be some way of preventing this appalling catastrophe ; you know of the poison, you must know of the antidote ? "

Philippe, weak, credulous, and utterly selfish, was already feeling the pangs of death ; his face blanched, his knees trembled, and rising he took two staggering steps towards the messenger and sank grovelling.

" I cannot die, you must save me, you have come to save me ? "

Again the stranger shook his head. " Indeed, your Royal Highness, I would if I could." Then hesitating, " There might indeed be one way, but——"

" Any way, any way, I will do whatever you say, only save me." Tears filled the Duke's eyes. But the other made no movement. " I fear you might not trust me ? "

" Indeed, yes, by Santa Gris ! I pray you by the Holy Madonna——" The stranger started back, his

hands thrown up, "Have a care, Highness; what I offer you has nothing to do with the saints. If you would trust in them, do so, but pray them to prepare you for death."

"No, no, what you will, only save me."

"Rise then, be seated, now look upon this." From below his cloak he brought forth a crystal ball. Eager though he was, Philippe hesitated. "This is sorcery?"

"The death of Madame, was not that also of the evil one? Yet I do not press your Royal Highness. I would not even suggest such an expedient were it not that the torments of Madame were as nothing to what the victim of the second tasting will endure ere death." But Monsieur could stand no more.

"Mon Dieu! I hesitate no longer, tell me what to do."

"Look then, fear nothing, think nothing, only trust." Placing the ball before Philippe's terrified gaze, the messenger began to make over his forehead slow rhythmical passes, chanting the while in low monotonous tones:

"Aince crowdie, twice crowdie;
Three times crowdie in a day;
Gin ye crowdie ony may,
Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away."

Upon Philippe this to him incomprehensible but all the more mysterious spell, had a strange effect as he listened, gazing fixedly at the crystal; his eyes grew glazed and heavy, his head drooped, and he slept.

The messenger stopped. "Oddsfish! What a fool the fellow is," he muttered. Then speaking low but distinctly he questioned:

"You are asleep? Answer me."

"Yes, I am asleep."

"You will go back in thought to the day of Madame's death. Had you heard from the Chevalier Lorraine that day?"

"No."

"When had you last heard from him?"

"Five days before, he wrote begging me to get him reinstated."

"Did he send you anything to give to Madame?"

"No, nothing."

"Did he speak of the advantage of her removal?"

"No, he did not speak of her at all."

For the next ten minutes question followed question. Monsieur was ready, almost eager to answer; he had no shame in exposing the baseness of his heart, doing so with a simplicity that almost excused its vileness. He owned to having wished Madame dead, if by her death he could get Lorraine back; but that he had never really contemplated her removal, or moved a finger to hasten her death, became more and more evident as the examination proceeded. Suddenly some one tried the closed door. "Tell them to go away, you are at your devotions." Monsieur obeyed fretfully, and the knocking ceased.

"You are sure that Lorraine never suggested to you how easy it would be to put her away?"

"No, never."

It was impossible to doubt the sleeping man; the self-called messenger stopped questioning, and stood looking down at his victim.

"If you had done it, or even allowed it to be done, I would have wakened you and made you fight for your life, but you are innocent of her death, I do believe," he muttered. "But, damme, for all you made her suffer in life, you shall suffer a little too." With a swift movement he unfastened the high-heeled pattens which had made him so unnaturally tall and thrust them and his long beard into the pocket of his cloak; going to the mirror he carefully removed the glistening white powder from his face and arranged his apparel; then returning to Philippe, he spoke with decision.

"Listen. In twenty minutes you will awake. You will think you have dreamt of the devil, but you will not be sure if it was not reality, and you will be afraid about the poison, very afraid. You will perhaps feel sick, and that will make you even more

unhappy. Now you will call your page (he shot the bolt back noiselessly as he spoke) and tell him to conduct your new Confessor secretly to the gate of the privy garden."

Philippe, who sat with his back half turned to the door, again obeyed, giving the orders as directed, and five minutes later the page had bowed the strange Abbé out to where, beyond the gate, a man was holding his horse.

CHAPTER III

THE last sweet notes of the violins died away and Signor Lulli laid down his baton.

"Enough, my children. To-morrow we meet again ; in a week's time we play for Vespers and the Vigil of the Dead ; and upon the next day our gracious lady is to be laid to rest. We shall not permit one eye to remain tearless on that most sorrowful occasion ; is it not so, *mes enfants* ? Now go."

The rehearsal was over, the men bowed and withdrew ; one only remained seated, his chin on his hand, his violin across his knee. Lulli turned to him now.

"My little ones improve, Monsieur Simon ?"

"They play most divinely, Signore, you may indeed feel proud of them."

"Ah, monsieur, we all loved her, we of the Little Violins. She was of the few who understand, she had not much knowledge, but her instinct was faultless, she had taste, she could appreciate ; that is why we begged his Most Christian Majesty that we, rather than the orchestra of M. l'Abbé Perrin, might do her the last honours. That, too, is why I have consented to your request. She was not all of France, your country also loved her and had a part in her, though truly that air is neither of your country nor of France, but of the East."

"That is possible," the other replied thoughtfully ; "it must have come through many lands, for it is a

gypsy melody." Then he too rose, wrapping up his violin, and with a word more of thanks and praise to the musician, went away.

The sun was sinking and a soft red glow illumined the waters of the Seine. Simon stopped for a moment on the Pont Neuf to look at the dark outline of the Louvre and the Tuileries. It was there he had first seen her.

"La jeune enfant d'Angleterre
Qui semblait un ange sur terre,
Que mentait le Roy très chrétien,
Dansa si parfaitement bien."

Now she danced no more, but lay so still under her golden pall, awaiting her tardy burial in the resting-place of kings.

Simon lingered on in Paris, because he could not tear himself away until those final honours had been paid. Yet it was six weeks since he had first come to France, and he was as near a solution (since Monsieur had unconsciously cleared himself) as he was ever like to be. He was, he thought, as he turned away, like the hero of an old play he had seen acted when Madame was at Dover.

"Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave that I . . .
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words."

But though he too had acted his play the guilty person was not yet unmasked: that was the rub. He passed on now, brows drawn and eyes on the ground, till a touch on his arm made him turn quickly; his hand was on his sword, but he removed it instantly and bowed to his accoster, who carried a small white wand. At the same instant he perceived that unostentatiously three or four musketeers had appeared from different quarters.

"Monsieur will pardon me an unpleasant duty, especially to an old acquaintance, but 'in the King's name,' M. Kelston; no, no, I do not ask for your

sword, merely that you will go with me. I assure you I have not disliked my duty so much since I arrested M. Fouquet nearly nine years ago."

"I am much honoured that such an illustrious Captain as Monsieur D'Artagnan should be chosen to arrest so humble a person as myself," and with another bow he followed his captor to the carriage which stood drawn up near the end of the bridge. So this was the finish of his doubts and uncertainties? For the moment he felt almost relieved that it should be so. Still, as the carriage with its darkened windows and cavalcade of musketeers jolted over the cobbles, he asked, would it be indiscreet to inquire the reason for his arrest?

"Indeed, monsieur it would not only be indiscreet but entirely useless, seeing I have not the faintest idea," his captor had replied. "I only know that it was to be kept very secret, that you will be entered in the books of the Bastille as 'M. Simon,' a name under which you have, I believe, often passed in Paris. Otherwise, I know nothing; let us talk of other things." And for the rest of the way he did so, entertaining his prisoner with a dozen amusing though sometimes scandalous tales of the frail, fair ladies of Paris and the Court.

Presently the carriage stopped, some sharp orders were given, bars jangled as the heavy gate opened; then the carriage moved again, drew up in the courtyard of the Bastille, and the gate closed behind it with a clang.

"Monsieur will have the kindness to wear this while passing through the courtyard," said D'Artagnan, as he handed Simon a small black velvet mask, Inviting him to follow he alighted and led the way into a long building at the farther end of the great fortress, of whose towering walls Simon caught but a glimpse as he followed.

Inside the Council Room they were received by the Governor, and Kelston was requested to place upon the table the contents of his pockets. Apparently their scantiness did not satisfy the Governor, who,

touching a bell beside him, gave orders that the prisoner be very thoroughly searched. Nothing further being found, however, his violin, sword, hunting-knife, and the various odds and ends from his pockets were carefully wrapped up and sealed, and a written statement that they were his was given to Kelston to sign. Finally the Captain of the Musketeers led him by some stairs and passages and ushered him into what he explained was one of the best rooms in the prison; the very one, in fact, in which the unfortunate Fouquet had been incarcerated during his prolonged trial. Had he supped? No? Then supper would certainly be sent to him. As for a servant, as he did not appear to have one in Paris, arrangements would be made to supply him to-morrow; in the meantime, he trusted M. Simon would not find himself too uncomfortable. He apologised too for the behaviour of the Governor. Baisemans, he explained, was a man of no breeding, the 'De Montesun' which he added to his name being the title of a family to which he was only related through Adam and Eve, or, at the nearest, through Noah. "But what will you? Eleven thousand louis will purchase titles but will not make a gentleman."

Simon roused himself to make the necessary acknowledgments to these courtesies; he had not enjoyed being searched, and he longed to be alone, but he would not have this dare-devil Frenchman think him overwhelmed in the face of misfortune.

The room in which at last D'Artagnan left him was, as he had said, not a bad one for a prison. The window was of fair size though, owing to the thickness of the walls and the great bars, it did not light the interior too well; still, by standing at one side, it was possible to see part of the bastion of the Porte St Antoine and even get a glimpse of the Faubourg. The room was sparsely but sufficiently furnished, and the meal which was presently brought to him was excellent.

Well, this then was the end? That death was the least he could expect if he were caught he had

never hidden from himself. Lying sleepless in the stillness of this lone place, he went over the events of the past month, the disguises and the parts played, by which he had sought to get at the truth. Had he failed? or was it as Mme Lafayette had come to believe, that the whole rumour of poison was false? He could not tell, he wished he had seen Feuillet the Jansenist priest, and yet could he know more than what Madame herself believed? Anne, his Anne, would he meet her again? At Dover they had spoken of the next world; but what or where was it, would not death be all? . . . Suppose they did not kill him, suppose instead they left him here to rot as so many others had been left? He thought of Fouquet, the brilliant Superintendent who had lain in this very room expecting death; and instead, was still living out a dreary existence, so much worse than death, in some prison of France; Fouquet had been forty-seven at the time of his arrest, he was twenty-seven; he might live another fifty years and never see the sun, nor feel the wind in his face, nor talk freely with his kind.

Simon sat up on his bed and stared into the darkness; the sweat was pouring off him; getting up he crept round his room to the door—it was bolted, as indeed he knew perfectly well it would be. Swiftly he crossed to the window, and stretching over the broad embrasure tried to shake the bars. For the first time in his life he knew what fear was, the horror of a trapped thing. It was only for a moment, though it seemed an eternity. Almost at once he regained his self-control and forced himself to lie down again; he was shivering now, though the night was very warm, but he would not give way again to his fear. Resolutely he turned his mind to other things. Davie had made him as a child learn many passages of Scripture by heart; now he began to repeat them, not at first with much thought of their meaning, but because the sound of the words gave his mind something to hold on to.

“Rejoice greatly, ye daughters of Jerusalem, Behold

your king cometh riding upon an ass. . . . Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope."

"'Prisoners of hope,' said Simon Kelston, "'prisoners of hope'? Yes, damme, one can at least be that, a prisoner of hope," he repeated dreamily, and with that he turned upon his side and fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

IN the week that followed Simon had need of all the hope he could muster, for in truth it seemed as if he had been forgotten; day after day passed and nothing happened. Except for the servant that had been duly provided for him, he saw no one but the porteclef who, taciturn like most of his trade, never took any notice of his prisoner when he let the servant in or out or waited, as he always did, when the latter shaved his master. As for the servant, himself a prisoner, it was twenty years since he had been without the walls of the Bastille, and his vacant face and apathetic manner were not calculated to encourage or reassure a newcomer.

Simon had been very little alone in his sociable, careless life, and such time as had been free from his duties with the King, or the cheerful intercourse of his fellows, had been lived in the company of his Lady of Dreams. Now that vision world was shattered and he was alone. He had asked for pen and paper and for some books; but no notice had been taken of the request and he did not repeat it. A sort of grim pride came to his aid these days. They were trying to break him? Well, they would find that none too easy.

Carefully and methodically Kelston began to plan his days. At certain times he forced himself to take exercise, the bell of the fortress struck at every hour and gave him something by which to regulate his life, for an hour each morning he walked his room, for the next half-hour he practised as with a foil, first his right hand and then his left. After

that came study, and here once more David's Scripture lessons stood him in good stead ; he had been a quick learner, the more so, perhaps, that he had seldom thought much of the meaning of what he learnt. Now he set himself to remember. His knowledge was of the Old Testament mostly, for David, like so many Scotsmen of his time, worshipped the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . . and darkness was upon the face of the deep. . . . And God said, Let there be light : and there was light."

Sometimes he stuck for a word ; that was maddening, but generally he found that if he let his mind go blank the word would come. Sometimes he made no attempt to remember exactly, but tried only to retell to himself the old stories ; to see Abraham and Isaac as they toiled up the mountain to where Abraham would bind his son upon the altar, and stretch forth his hand for his knife. Simon could remember the feeling of relief with which as a child he had spelt out the rest of the story : *"And He said, Lay not thy hand upon the lad."* Davie, he believed, was secretly inclined to disapprove this finish. Davie liked better the story of Lot's wife ; or better still, that of the flood : *"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh . . . and every thing that is in the earth shall die."* Simon could hear again the relish with which Gourlay rolled out these last words, and the remembrance made him laugh. It was wonderful how these old stories filled the morning.

He had secreted (quick to learn the ways of prisoners) one or two chicken bones, and on one occasion plums had provided a rare find in the shape of stones. He was inventing new games with these ; this and the singing of such songs as he knew made up the 'recreation' of his programme. Later he walked again, and the Psalms and what he could remember of the New Testament he kept for the long darkening evenings.

“O Lord, to whom vengeance belongeth.” Was he growing superstitious, or was it only that he had been dwelling so much of late upon that word? It was strange at least, how often, when uncertain where to commence his daily recitation, it was to some such passage as this that his mind flew. “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.” “For we know Him that saith vengeance belongeth unto me . . . it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Had he been presumptuous in his effort to take this vengeance into his own hand? He had called it justice; the merest justice which France would not give and England dare not claim; and pat upon that came the question: “Who madest thee a judge over us?” and again: “For God is judge Himself.” It was almost as if alone here in his prison he held argument with some unseen Presence, Someone who gave question for question, answer for answer, tearing his pretensions to shreds. “Who art thou that judgest another?”

If he were free now would he still, as he had been more than half minded to do, seek out Lorraine in Italy, and if he could not prove him guilty of Madame’s death, at least punish him for the misery she had suffered in life? Would he? He hardly knew, yet more and more was growing upon him a sense of thankfulness that the justice he had demanded was withheld from his taking. “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.”

On the seventh morning after his arrest, his servant brought him a change of linen and the black suit he had worn as the Abbé. So they had found his belongings? Well, there was nothing incriminating about them. The various disguises had been carefully destroyed after use and he had no papers of any sort. He enquired of his servant if there was any reason for his change of dress, but he did not know. He was not kept long in suspense, however, as he was no sooner dressed and shaved than the door was again unlocked to admit the Captain of the Musketeers.

“So, Monsieur Simon, we meet again, and now once more I must pray you to accompany me.”

“I am in your hands, Monsieur le Capitaine, to do as you command.” Simon stood up, and the other with a bow bade him pass before him.

“This covered way,” he explained, “was built specially for M. Fouquet. He went to and fro by it to the Council for his trial; it lasted three years, you may remember.”

A soldier opened a postern door and once again Simon found himself in a carriage with its surrounding soldiers. This time he had no idea of his destination; only by the sound of the wheels which had ceased to jolt over cobbles and were instead bumping rather laboriously over softer ground he judged they had left the town. Once more M. d'Artagnan enlivened the road by gossip and anecdote, refraining with French politeness from anything that could suggest that they were not taking a mere excursion of pleasure upon perfectly equal terms. On his part Simon's pride forbade his asking for information which was not volunteered, thus for something over half an hour they travelled until once more the carriage stopped. This time the prisoner was blindfolded before being bidden to alight, and hurriedly led through an inner door and up what might have been a private staircase to an antechamber, where the bandage was removed.

“And now, monsieur, I again regret my duty. Will you put your hands behind you?”

With slightly raised brows Simon obeyed and his wrists were neatly but firmly bound together. That done, the Captain of the Musketeers knocked at a curtained door; it was opened, and he held a whispered conversation with some one within. There was a pause, during which he stood stiffly to attention; then the unseen speaker returned, an order was given, and D'Artagnan beckoned the prisoner to enter; but first, as Simon was unable to do so himself, he removed his hat.

Simon went slowly through the doorway, paused

on the threshold, and then, taking a step forward, he went on one knee ; he was in the presence of the King of France.

Louis sat near a paper-strewn table from beside which another man had just risen. This was Monsieur Colbert his minister whose brother, the Ambassador at Charles's Court, was well known to Simon. Making a sign to the prisoner that he might rise, Louis spoke to D'Artagnan, bidding him wait in the antechamber. "M. Colbert has some orders for you," he said, and the Captain of Musketeers saluted and withdrew, holding the door open for the Minister. Not until they were alone did Louis speak again ; then he went straight to the point.

"When you were last in Paris, M. Kelston, it was upon the business of my brother, the King of England ; you have been for many years the most confidential of his confidential agents, am I to understand that he is dissatisfied with the full and true reports which have been sent to him of the lamented death of Madame, his sister and mine, that he sends you to play the mountebank and, if need be, the murderer in my Court ? "

"Your Most Christian Majesty does the King of England a wrong," Simon answered gravely. "It is true that in times past I have come to Paris as his agent ; but on this occasion I came neither at his bidding nor with his knowledge. I have not seen the King, my master, since two days after the death of Madame. I had received permission to leave his service and go to my own estate in Scotland as my health had not been good and my affairs were in some disorder. I was on the eve of departure when the tragic news came (the King was naturally in great confusion and distress) and I did not see him again ; if he thinks of me at all, it is as being in Scotland. I do not know what word your Most Christian Majesty has sent to my master. I know only the common gossip of the streets."

"That Madame had been poisoned ? "

"That Madame had been poisoned."

"I know something of your story, M. Kelston," Louis said, suddenly changing his tone, "therefore I will not ask you why you presumed to take this office of investigator of crime upon yourself. You need not fence with me. I understand from what you say that if I were to have you broken upon the wheel, as your insolence merits, the King your master would raise no finger to save you, he would deny any knowledge of your undertaking."

"The King my master has no knowledge of my undertaking."

"As you will," said Louis calmly. "It is a necessity often laid upon kings. The King of England dare not quarrel with me, yet at first he, too, may have listened to the gossip of the streets, may have feared that I would not dare to punish her murderer; you, who arrogantly presumed to love her and who care for nothing but to avenge her, thought, and he in his heart agreed with you, that you could avenge her without embroiling your country. Had you waited, you would have known the truth as he does; but you set out hot foot apparently for Scotland, only you never reached Scotland because at Blakeney, where you are not known, you took boat for France. Bah! I am better served than you think, monsieur." Suddenly he leaned forward, grasping the arms of his chair and speaking in low, rapid tones. "In only one thing did we undervalue your audacity; we did not believe that you would actually dare to practise your diabolical tricks upon a Son of France."

"Yet that I did so dare can be a matter of satisfaction even to your Most Christian Majesty," Simon answered quietly, "for even you, Sire, cannot have been entirely free from the suspicion of the streets; the whispers of the Court must have penetrated to one so well served, now your mind can be once more at ease. Monsieur the Duke of Orleans is, unless it be by his constant ill-treatment of her, not guilty of the death of his wife." The King half rose; there was a spot of angry colour in his usually pale cheeks and for a moment Simon thought he was about to strike him;

but he controlled himself instantly, sinking back on his chair.

"You are insolent," he said, "but your insolence shall not go unpunished." Then, as if in spite of his anger his impartial mind had grasped a use in this coolly given testimony to his brother's innocence, he went on speaking with calm deliberation.

"Your impertinent imaginings are of no importance to us who know their absurdity; yet it is because what you say may have weight with the King your master that we do not at once condemn you to the death you deserve; for, though he has outwardly accepted the report of our Ambassador, it is possible that inward doubt may remain suggesting, if you disappeared, that your discovery of some inconvenient secret was the real cause of your removal. For this reason only do you escape the death of a criminal, nor will you even suffer imprisonment for long but will be sent back to your master. Nevertheless, you cannot go unpunished. You have dared in thought to raise your hand against a Son of France; your right hand, therefore, will pay the price of your presumption. After that you may return to England."

Simon's head went up with a little jerk. For a moment he gazed at the haughty mask before him with wide uncomprehending eyes that changed and narrowed as realisation dawned. If Louis desired revenge he had it in that instant; in the next, the face before him was as coldly proud as his own.

"Sire, when I presumed to love Madame I asked no better than to die in her service. Had I found her murderer I would have done justice upon him whoever he might be; if, therefore, you choose for me a punishment worse than death, I can say nothing."

Then his pride went from him and he dropped again on one knee.

"Only, Sire, because to you too her memory is dear, I do ask one favour. Let me go free to-morrow, when at last she is to be buried, let me use my hand once more in her honour; after that—what you will."

"What would you do?" asked Louis.

“Play once more among the Little Violins, that is all.”

“And in the crowd find escape easy?”

Simon rose, straightening his shoulders. “I have given you my word, Sire, the word of a gentleman in whose veins flows blood as old as that of Bourbon or Stuart.” Then he laughed, and the dark eyes fixed on Louis were contemptuous. “You know very little about love, Most Christian King, if you think one may use the name of the Beloved for a subterfuge such as that.”

“Very well,” said Louis the imperturbable, “I grant you this favour, afterwards you shall return at once to the Bastille where the delayed sentence will be carried out.”

“I thank you, Sire,” said Simon Kelston.

“Is it your life, Monsieur?” D’Artagnan stole a glance at the stern, set face beside him as they drove back to the Bastille.

“No, it is my right hand.”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” ejaculated the Captain of Musketeers and talked no more; a silence for which Simon was profoundly grateful. But, having conveyed his prisoner safely to his cell, the Captain lingered.

“I have had the honour to see you fence, monsieur. There was a pass by which you disarmed your opponent. I am myself something of a swordsman but that particular riposte was new to me.”

Simon’s face lightened. “If it is permitted, and if you can procure two foils, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to teach you, monsieur. I learnt it from an old Savoyard, and there is no one to whom I would more willingly pass it on.”

“His fencing even with his left hand is above the average,” D’Artagnan said to the Governor when two hours later he returned the foils, “but with his right he is an artist—it is most unfortunate.”

But to this Baisemans only vouchsafed a grunt.

CHAPTER V

MADAME LAFAYETTE cast one horrified glance round the Abbey and dropped her face in her hands. She should have expected it, of course, since for what other reason had Madame's last obsequies been so long delayed but that every possible means should be used to make them the grandest and most ornate that the ancient church had ever beheld ; fitted to do honour to the lofty station which had been hers in the most magnificent court of Europe. The Most Christian King would have it so ; it was, she admitted, his way of showing the respect and admiration he had undoubtedly felt for his sister-in-law ; it was also his way of showing Europe what a mighty monarch he himself was. Yes, she should have been prepared ; she had known that the beautiful old Abbey would be unrecognisable under festoons, of black velvet, tapestries of white and silver, escutcheons and the like ; but these enormous skeletons of imitation marble supporting the drapery of the nave, the cupids drooping over urns of incense, the emblematic figures, nobility, youth, poetry and the rest, filled her with loathing.

On a platform within the choir stood the great tomb of black marble supported by leopards of bronze ; sham marble, sham bronze—like the Court itself, Madame Lafayette thought bitterly, but oh, how unlike her beloved Princess, so simple for all her high estate, so sincere in her simplicity. How her wit would have played upon all this ostentatious sham, how she would have shrugged her pretty shoulders as she looked round on the crowds assembled to see and be seen. Madame Lafayette raised her eyes to where above the tomb, covered by a magnificent pall of embroidered cloth of gold bordered with ermine and surmounted by the ducal mantle and crown, lay the mortal remains of her who, so short a while before, had been leader and chief of

all that was most real and joyous in the magnificent court of France. As she did so she caught a glimpse of the Queen seated with the King of Poland and the English lords in the tribune; she had come incognita, come, no one could doubt, with a sincerity as real as Madame's own. Madame would have appreciated that; she had been glad when all the petty jealousies and misunderstandings which had at one time separated her from the affection of this much tried woman had been broken and overcome.

But now at last all was ready. The chief mourners, preceded by a hundred poor people dressed in grey, each bearing a torch of white wax and followed by all the officers and servants of Madame's household were in their places; the King-at-Arms and his four Heralds were at the corners of the tomb. Suddenly, as if by magic, the hundreds of tapers were lighted and from the urns, which till now had but sent out cloudy incense, flames burst forth lighting and, as it were, making real and awe-inspiring that which had before seemed tawdry and untrue. Then, to the chanting of the King's choristers accompanied by Lulli's famous violins, the Archbishop of Rheims and his twelve assistant monks celebrated mass.

For a time a hushed reverence held the huge audience, to be broken by murmurs of expectation as Bossuet, the new Bishop of Condom, wearing upon his finger the ring which was Madame's dying gift, entered the pulpit. Only eight months before Madame herself had sat with all the Court listening to the eloquence of this famous preacher as he pronounced the great oration over her mother, '*la Reine Malheureuse*.' On that occasion the golden tongue of the orator had played upon a theme, pleasing in its exquisite sadness to the ears of most of his audience yet remote from personal terror, the death of a woman already old, tired of life, and long prepared for her end.

To-day a different feeling stirred his listeners, as one by one he stripped from them those things in which they trusted. "Health is but a name, life but a dream, glory but a shadow, pleasure and

delight a perilous gleam. ‘*Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas.*’”

Before their dread-filled eyes lay the coffin that neither golden pall nor mists of incense could make other than a casket for the dead, and in their ears rang once again the cry of that ‘woeful night,’ “*Madame se meurt, Madame est morte.*”

The preacher himself paused, overcome by emotion, and from that great assembly as from one soul came a sob of mingled grief and fear.

But Bossuet would not leave them thus; if on his worldly side man is all vanity yet all is real and weighty if we look at him in respect to God. “*Madame met death gently and sweetly, as she met all else. . . . What matter it if her life was short? That which ends can never be long. . . . I trust her to that Mercy to which she appealed so heartily and humbly.*”

And now, one by one, with every mark of affection and grief, the officers of Madame’s household cast their badges of office into her grave, and even as they did so there floated upon the solemn stillness the notes of a single violin. A violin? Was it not rather the cry of a soul gathering up in its own passionate pain the inarticulate longing of each in this vast multitude, offering their sorrow with its own at that newly-opened grave? Then, as the coffin was carried to the vault the music ended as suddenly as it had begun. There was a sharp sound as if a bow had been broken, and on the instant the orchestra took up and carried on the slow, majestic melody, plaintive and haunting yet strangely impersonal, so that the assembly, relieved from the almost too poignant pain of that solitary instrument, could weep in comfortable serenity.

And already outside the great church a man came through the crowd, a tall man before whose stricken face the people made way; in his left hand he still carried a fiddle but there was no bow in his right. His face was turned towards Paris, and he walked with a long easy stride which soon brought him beyond the masses about the Cathedral into the open country beyond. It was a long walk from St

Denis to Paris and the roads were rough ; but to a man trained by Charles of England the distance did not seem great and he carried a pass which opened every gate to his bidding. The afternoon was still young, therefore, when he came before the twin towers of the guard-house to the Bastille. For one moment he paused, stepping back to look up at the wall and the eight great towers of the fortress beyond.

"Madame est morte." What after all did anything matter now ? Presenting his pass to the sentry Simon crossed the drawbridge and the doors closed behind him.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLES had lately returned from two days' stag-hunting at Windsor and had gone to see Mistress Gwyn in her new house in Pall Mall. Nell was looking her prettiest and as ready as ever to amuse, but Charles was restless and out of sorts. Autumn had set in with an early touch of frost and he had insisted upon a fire ; now the room was almost unbearably hot and Nelly was at her wit's end.

"When is Sim Kelston coming back ?" she asked of a sudden, "I never remember him to be away so long. Where has he gone ?"

"To Scotland," said the King, with a queer laugh.

"Scotland ?" She made a face, and not wishing to turn Charles's thoughts to a place she knew he hated, "I thought might be you had packed him off so he could not disapprove this new French miss," she pouted.

"Oh, for pity's sake, Nell, do not you grow jealous," Charles snapped irritably.

"Jealous ? Me jealous ? Love you, no. I leave that to 'the Lady,'" she tossed her curls.

"The Duchess," he corrected with his wicked grin, referring to Castlemaine's new title.

"To the Duchess." She accepted the correction with a sweeping curtsey and a lift of her eyes heavenwards, so that he must needs laugh for all his ill

humour. "Maybe if I had her temper you would make a lady of me too?" she hazarded, and then before he could answer she had an arm about him, her soft cheek against his. "Bless you, Charles, I never loved 'ee that a way, dear heart." She was very pretty and he knew she spoke truth, so his ill humour fled as he kissed her; all the same he sighed.

"There is nothing for any one to be jealous about—yet," he told her. "She is as cold as ice."

Mistress Gwyn's eyebrows went up, so this was the trouble, she thought, but quick to take his side all she said was, "Then she be more fool than even I took her for; but you'll melt her ice soon enough, my King, never fear." A comfortable person, Mistress Gwyn.

When he rose to go she harped back to Kelston. "I like him," she said. "He is a good lad but he don't make you feel bad the way Mr Evelyn and some of his kind does, looking down their noses same's if they still smelt the oranges. Fetch him back, Charles, he can't want to stay in Scotland and you miss him too. It's like you'd lost your shadow seeing you tramping about without him."

Walking back across the Park with that swift stride that Kelston alone had never had any difficulty in keeping pace with, Charles found himself agreeing with her; he did miss Simon. Where the devil had the fellow got to? He wished now that he had never let him go; even if Madame had been murdered what could he do? He could not bring her back and it was no use crying over spilt milk.

At Whitehall it appeared that the French Ambassador's barge had been waiting for some time at the private stairs. Chiffinch who informed the King of this added that the Ambassador had with him one of those carrying sedans of the latest pattern, a present probably. Chiffinch rather thought from the lackeys' careful handling that it was not empty. Mr Chiffinch permitted himself to smile and Charles laughed outright. "Not empty? Well, if there be a prisoner shut up in it, Will, he—or she?—will not be pleased at the delay, for indeed, I now remember

me that I promised the Ambassador an audience at three o'clock and it is now near six! Bid his Excellency bring up his chair. I will see him in my bedroom, and alone."

The chair was brought. The Ambassador, had Charles had eyes to observe him, looking troubled, bade the lackeys withdraw, and presented a letter from the King his master to the King of England.

"Had we not better raise the lid?" enquired Charles, regarding the richly curtained chair with a smile, but M. Colbert was not eager. "If his Majesty would be pleased first to read the letter." Charles, still eyeing the chair, shrugged his shoulders but obeyed. As he read, however, his pleasant anticipation gave way to puzzled annoyance, to be followed, as he perused it a second time, by a gathering sense of fear. Louis, having briefly referred to his hope that his gift might prove acceptable in spite of the use to which, for reasons of secrecy, it had been first put, reasons which he believed would be desired by Charles even more than by himself, proceeded: "My Brother. We, who have so lately been drawn more than ever together by our common grief in the lamented death of our beloved sister, cannot be held responsible for the crimes and insolences committed by presumptuous servants; yet, because we share the annoyance which such an offence entails, it is fitting that we share also the punishing of the offender. I have thought proper, therefore, to inflict certain chastisement upon such an one whom I now deliver to your further discretion, confident that you will continue to let me enjoy your friendship as freely as I give you mine."

Charles, having finished his second reading, looked no more at the chair but demanded haughtily of M. Colbert what his master might mean.

"I have no knowledge beyond my instructions, Sire."

"Which were?"

"To have this gentleman who was brought to the Embassy two days ago conveyed in as secret a manner as possible into your presence. If your

Majesty will permit me I, having fulfilled my instructions, will retire. He will himself best explain the situation."

Charles's face was dark but he dared show no further sign of the anger that stirred him until Colbert opened the chair. Then, with a cry of horror, he demanded, "Have they killed him? Have you dared to bring me a corpse?" And indeed for a moment it seemed as if this were really the case. In the chair, gagged and his arms bound to his sides, sat the King's shadow. His eyes were closed and his head hung forward limply. "He has fainted, sir," Colbert said hurriedly. "We had not intended keeping him trussed up so long, but your Majesty may remember that you delayed the audience. May I unfasten him now?"

Charles nodded without speaking, and the Frenchman, taking a knife from his pocket, cut the cords, removed the gag, and from a small phial which he carried wet the prisoner's lips. Kelston groaned as the blood began to flow back to his cramped limbs, then he opened his eyes and saw the King. Instantly, he was on guard. Putting out a hand he pulled himself rather stiffly to his feet. Charles had turned his back on them and was looking out of the window. Colbert offered Kelston his shoulder; he had always liked him and he was sorry for him now.

"As his Majesty was under the impression I was going to Scotland it must be exceedingly unpleasant for him, monsieur, to have me returned like this," Simon drawled. He was wondering how much knowledge the King had shown and what he had already been told. Charles swung round. He took no notice of Kelston but addressed the Ambassador.

"I have no key to the meaning of all this stage play, monsieur, but if you still maintain that you also are without knowledge you had better retire; later I shall have something to say to you; but now, if Mr Kelston has an explanation I will hear it alone."

The Ambassador bowed very low and did as he was bidden. He was not sorry to get away. Kelston

was supporting himself by the end of the bed, and not until they were alone did the King speak again, "Well, sir, what have you to say?" he asked shortly.

"I—I am very sorry," Simon began, with a weak little laugh. "But—may I sit on the floor, Charles? I'm afraid if I do not I shall be sick."

"For God's sake, sit down then," said Charles irritably. Simon did so, his back against the bed, his long legs stretched before him.

"How long had they kept you trussed up like that?" the King asked presently, when the colour had begun to come back to Kelston's face.

"About ten days, I think, while they got me out of France and over here; not all the time; they generally let me more or less free at night unless they were travelling. I was six weeks in the Bastille before that."

"Seems you have miscarried your business pretty thoroughly," Charles said gloomily.

"Yes. You see, Monsieur did not kill her, nor Lorraine so——"

"How do you know?"

"Do you remember when the Abbé Pregnani was here how one night he put young Reresby to sleep and made him tell us his silly thoughts and doings? I put Monsieur to sleep that way; if he had killed her he would have had to tell me; but he had not killed her."

"You put Monsieur to sleep that way? You dared?"

"Oh, I have paid for my daring," Simon retorted, stung to unwonted bitterness. He had gone white again. Charles poured some wine from a bottle on the table and handed it to him. Simon took the glass in his left hand.

"What's wrong with your other hand?" Charles's voice was sharp because he was afraid. Simon drank the wine and put the glass down carefully on the floor beside him even so it rattled a little. "His Most Christian Majesty kept it," he said with affected coolness, but he did not look up.

"You mean . . .?"

Simon moved his right arm ; at the cuff of his coat sleeve it ended abruptly.

"My God !" said Charles and turned away. Simon thrust his handless sleeve back into the pocket of his coat ; his eyes searched the floor about him as he sat very still, he seemed to be looking for something that was not there.

Charles came back and flung himself into his chair, moving it slightly so that he could not see the man by the bed.

"Better tell me the whole story," he said. Simon did so, as tersely as possible ; he outlined his endeavours to find the murderer, if such a person existed. When he told of Monsieur's terror and his imaginary pains Charles laughed aloud. "It was damned impertinent of you, Simon, but I wish I had been there to see you." For the moment he had forgotten what had followed, then his brows drew together. "But this was the beginning of August ; why did you not come home then ?"

"They had put off her funeral, I—she lay there alone in that great church—oh yes, there was a guard of course."

"You are a fool, Simon," the King said but good-humouredly. "You could have gone openly had you so wished."

"Yes, with Vernon and Armstrong and all the snivelling crowd."

"It was you who played then ? I heard of that," then recollecting, "it was not until after—*that* happened ?"

"It was the same afternoon when I got back to the Bastille. They caught me a week before, but I had asked this favour from the King. I gave him my word I would return, so he permitted it."

"Louis had that," once more Charles indicated without looking at the mutilated arm, "done deliberately and in cold blood ?"

"Oh, quite deliberately ; one might almost say with personal consideration," Simon sneered.

"I would to the devil I had never listened to your

mad scheme," Charles burst out petulantly; "it was a fool's errand from the first, and now what am I to do?" He got up and began to pace up and down.

Simon pulled himself to his feet and stood watching him half wistfully.

"I have missed you horribly, Sim. Even Nelly noticed it; she spoke about you to-day, and wished you were back; but I, I cannot have you back like that."

"No," Simon said gently. "I think the King of France calculated upon that."

"It's a damned nuisance," said Charles. "I wish——" he stopped abruptly.

Simon laughed. "I wish so too," he said, "but he was afraid if he took my head you would think it was because I knew too much; besides, his Most Christian Majesty is a master in the art of punishment."

"I did not mean that," snapped Charles flushing. "Oddsfish, man, I know it is hard on you too; but you brought it on yourself. You had no business to play pranks with the King's brother. Madame would not have approved, though I will say it was damned funny. You caught Louis on his tenderest spot; he has no sense of humour, so you have to take the consequences. But don't you see it puts me in the devil of a predicament? He will think I am an accomplice unless I make some sort of a show of punishing you too?"

"Yes," Simon said slowly. "I had not thought of that." He was so accustomed to considering Charles that the incongruity of thus having to find further punishment for himself did not for the moment strike him; but Charles, shooting a quick glance at him, felt a pang of contrition.

"Oddsfish, I think you have had enough."

Simon smiled at him; at that moment he was grateful for even this sign of careless affection, but it did not occur to him to presume on it. "I do not want to go to the Tower," he said with a little grimace. The thought of four walls and a locked door was unbearable to a man so lately free; then his face

cleared. "Where am I supposed to be now? Scotland? Good, then I shall go to Scotland and you will write to his Most Christian Majesty that you have sent me there. He knows your affection for that poor country so will appreciate the severity of your wrath. And as I am already there no one here need be troubled with the matter. No, my King," as Charles was about to offer some half-hearted protest, "a one-handed gentleman of the bed-chamber is of no use to you here, and I would as soon not meet my friends yet; let me go."

So it was settled.

"Have I your permission to go to my own apartment now?" Simon asked a few minutes later and would have moved to the private door, but Charles stopped him.

"Gourlay moved your things some three weeks ago," he said quickly. "You see, we did not know what had happened. It was better he should be ready, and if he had been seen here it would have made talk, seeing he is nearly as well known as you. The rooms are being redecorated, there are workmen in them." Charles was so evidently embarrassed that once more Simon came to his rescue. David, he ascertained, had been well supplied with money by Will Chiffinch and was lodging with some Puritan fellow of his own acquaintance in the city. Simon could get his address from Will.

His heart was a little bitter as he left the King; but after all he was, he told himself, a fool to mind; he had always known that Charles was like that, caring for no one really but himself—and Madame, he had cared for Madame.

Crossing the privy garden, his hat well drawn over his eyes, Simon stopped abruptly; a girl sat in the arbour, a girl waiting for some one. As she saw him she rose smiling, took a step forward, and then with quick recognition shrank back with a cry of alarm. It was Louise de Kéroualle.

PART II

[*Note.*—The Scots of the seventeenth century being a language and not a dialect, no attempt has been made in this work to do more than indicate it.]

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE Commissioners of Excise were holding a meeting in Dumfries and the inns were full of them and their retinues.

The innkeeper of the Hole in the Wa' was apologetic. "The gentleman could not have a room to himself, but it might be possible to share one."

"No, it would not be possible." David Gourlay cut the landlord short and went back to where his master sat impatiently awaiting him. "That is the third inn full to overflowing and the laddie just dead beat, Lord pity us," he muttered. Then with his hand on the horse's neck as he stood looking up at Simon, "There was a decent auld body kept a lodging down by in the Friar's Vennel."

"Twenty years ago, Davie. I doubt her lodging will be over strait for us by now," his master laughed wearily, "though I would be glad enough to lie down in it," he added, under his breath. "She had a daughter," began David; but Simon cut in again, "married and gone." Then relenting, "Never mind, go and see, I will wait here. I am not going to dismount again until we have found some hole to burrow in." He drew his horse under the lee of a tall overhanging house and dropped the reins on its neck while he pulled his cloak more closely about him.

The wind was bitter and little drifts of snow swept down the street from time to time; the few people who passed glanced askance at the tall horseman and hurried on. There was something sullen and unfriendly about the town, he thought, but was willing

to admit that this might be pure fancy arising from his own fatigue and newly acquired sensitiveness.

Another sound broke the quiet of the street, the steady tramp of feet in unison, and the next moment a small party of soldiers swung into sight. In their midst were two prisoners, a tall man with his head hastily bandaged and his arms bound behind him, and a lad, little more than a child, with a shock of sandy curls and a white frightened face. The boy was not tied but a soldier had him by the collar of his rough homespun jerkin.

As they came abreast of Simon an officer stepped out from a close opposite; the sergeant stopped his men and saluted. "Well, Falconer, not much of a haul to-night?" the officer said with a short laugh, surveying the prisoners. "The crows will not get many pickings off either of these."

"Not such a poor haul as it seems, sir," the sergeant answered. "He is one of their ministers and has been wanted a long while by those out by." He indicated with his thumb what he thought was the direction of the capital.

"Sir," said the old man, speaking, Simon noted with surprise, with the voice and accent of a gentleman, "if ye have any authority, I pray you let this child go; he did but come to tell me that his mother is dying and called for me; she is a widow and has no one else to care for her if the lad be taken."

"Well, an she wants your company she will get it sooner dead than alive, my friend, for it is short shrift you are like to get under the new Act." The officer said coarsely. "What business had she sending for such as you unless she be a rebel herself; in which case, I doubt not, she has brought up her brat to be the same."

"Nay, mother's aye conformed since faither died," the boy said, raising a tear-stained face. "It was for that she is feart——"

"And well she might, poor backsliding soul," said the old man, raising his eyes to heaven, "Sirs, sirs, let the laddie go back to her with a word of hope, seeing

I may not be there to point her to the Lord's mercy to such as repent and turn to Him, even though it be at the eleventh hour——”

“Oh, stop the canting old fool,” the officer burst out, and the soldier who held the boy leaned forward and shook the old man by the shoulder. As he did so the child slipped from his grasp and, diving between the legs of another of the soldiers, made for the dark alley behind Simon. The escape was so sudden and the attention of the others so fixed upon his companion that for a moment no one moved to catch him; in the next three soldiers were after him.

On seeing the horseman in the shadow the boy had hesitated. But, “Get on,” said Simon in a low voice and the child was past him and down the close like a streak. The soldier nearest was almost on him but the horse had become restive, backing into the narrow opening and blocking the way.

“Move your horse, sir, you are impeding justice,” cried the man.

“Move yourself, my man, you are frightening the poor beast so it takes me all my time to hold him, far less to move him,” Kelston retorted, and certainly the horse started and backed excitedly, though whether from fear or the faint pressure of the spur, the soldier could not be sure.

“Have you got him?” the sergeant called, and the officer moving forward caught sight of Kelston. “Who is it, an accomplice?”

It was dark in the shadow of the house. ‘I would make a dam’ suitable accomplice,’ thought Simon, a dottering old man, a child, and a cripple!’ but to the officer he said haughtily, “Call off your man, Lieutenant. I try to get some shelter in this inhospitable town; while my servant looks for a lodging a child flies past and upsets my horse, and now your soldiers dance about me with cries of ‘an escaped prisoner!’” He moved his horse forward out of the shadow as he spoke; the boy had had his chance. “Is he who has fled as dangerous a criminal as the one you have so successfully captured?” The scorn

and tone of authority were not lost on the officer, who coloured under their sting.

"Take your prisoner to the Castle, sergeant, and put him in the stable vaults; never mind the boy," he said shortly. And then, with an apologetic shrug to Kelston: "If you are a stranger, sir, I dare say you are astonished to find soldiers out after an apparently harmless old man; but you would be surprised what stirrers up of mischief and rebellion these fellows are." Then, keeping pace with the horse, "The town is full to-night with these gentlemen of the Excise; if the inns have no room, we could find you a bed at the Castle, I doubt not; it is a poor ramshackle place, but some of us are putting up there for the barracks are full too." He was impressed by this fine gentleman who somehow reminded him of the picture of the King which hung in the guard-room.

Kelston thanked him but was assured his servant would have found a lodging, and as he saw him approaching bade the Lieutenant good evening in a manner that left nothing possible to that young gentleman but withdrawal.

"Well?"

"They are both there," David said. "The mother is bedridden and the daughter was not for taking us; but when they heard who you were, the old woman wouldna' have you refused. She comes from Kells and minds your grandfather in the good days." David dropped his voice. "Did ye see yon puir man the devils had tied up like to a thief, Kells?"

"Yes," said Simon absently. He was thinking that had this happened in London half the town would be blocking the highway, yet here no one stirred; only the air seemed heavy with suspense as if the darkened windows were full of eyes.

"He was minister of a parish this side of Kells twenty years ago, a godly worthy gentleman and a notable setter forth of the Word of God. I had heard these wickednesses were being done, but that my

eyes should see the abomination of desolation, the godly man perishing and grey hairs——”

“If your widow can give us shelter, for Heaven’s sake let us get under cover,” Kelston interrupted irritably. This was no moment, he felt, to be patient with David’s rhapsodies. The man accepted the rebuke sulkily and in dignified silence led the way down the steep wynd to a house at the foot.

“If ye go up, I will see to the horses,” he said as they reached it. “The left-hand door at the top; I told her to expect you.”

The door was opened by a gaunt, elderly woman with the same dour expression that Kelston was beginning to expect. She curtsied, however, as he gave her his name, and led him into an inner room in which a box-bed and an extra mattress had been hastily prepared. The room was barely furnished but clean, and a good fire blazed in the grate. He explained David’s absence, and she nodded.

“He said he would bring in a collop or some such thing, for we have nought in the house to offer ye but oatmeal.”

He assured her they wanted nothing but somewhere to rest. She looked at him then, a long searching look. “Aye,” she said, “you look as if ye needed that, rest o’ body and rest o’ mind,” and with that she left him.

He stood for a moment without moving, then with a shrug he drew the stool to the fireside and sat down nursing his arm and watching the dancing flame from under drawn brows. Pain was a thing he understood or thought he did, unpleasant but to be endured with as little whining as possible; it was this new feeling of impotence, of being cut off from his kind, that frightened him. Two months ago he would have accepted that invitation to the barracks as a matter of course; now he must sit alone in a dreary room waiting for David to cut up his meat, pitied by his landlady.

“Seems you are growing mighty sorry for yourself, Sim, my lad,” he said with quick contempt and turned his thoughts outward.

Queer he should have come plumb into the troubles like this the very day he crossed the Border. Why, he wondered, had he helped the youngster, an arrant knave most like, to escape? The old fellow would be shut up by now. Had they untied him? Poor devil, he hoped they had. Charles had always told him he was a fool; he supposed it was this same foolishness that made him vaguely troubled now because a rebel being laid by the heels was, to outward seeming at least, no loud-voiced, boisterous cut-throat but a frail old man concerned for the souls of his flock.

Bah! It was none of his business anyway, only he hoped they had slackened that rope; it was damned painful to lie all night with your arms tightly bound. His business? That brought him up sharp against the thought that now he had no business.

God! How cold it was. He drew the stool nearer to the fire, but then he was too hot, at least his head burned and his arm. Why the devil was David so long in coming? Not that he wanted anything to eat; he shivered again and threw another log on to the fire. A drink would be acceptable. Gourlay, coming in ten minutes later with a steaming dish and a bottle of wine, found his master crouched over the fire with fever-lit eyes, and put him to bed there and then on the mattress because the box-bed was too short by a foot for his long limbs.

There for the next three days Simon tossed and turned, talking, talking; generally it was to Madame, though even in the height of his fever he never spoke her name; sometimes it was to Charles. Then he would have his fiddle and once, when the pain was at its worst, he went through the scene in the torture chamber of the Bastille. "And now, monsieur, place your hand here." Gourlay learnt then what before he had only suspected. It seemed on that third day that Simon was to have his wish, to slip his cable and sail out into the unknown in search of his lost lady. But in the widow's daughter David had an ally better than any doctor; and between them they pulled the

reluctant man back to earth, till on the fifth day the fever abated and he slept peacefully and at rest like a tired child.

"My God! David, if I look half such a scoundrel as you do, shave me quickly." Simon passed his thin hand over his bristly chin and regarded David with amused wonder. "How long have I been here?"

"Five days. And I can tell you, laddie, I have hardly had time to wash myself let alone shave; nor have I closed an eye till early this morning."

"Poor Davie! Have I been ill? I feel well enough now." He sat up and fell back again with a queer little laugh. "Lord!" said he weakly and said no more. Marion Grier, entering at the moment with a bowl of broth, stood looking down at him. "Young man, you take the Lord's Name very lightly upon your lips. Div' ye no ken how near ye cam to seeing His Face in judgment? Ye should be thanking Him rather that even now ye are no among them who, from the pains of hell, cry, 'Lord, Lord,' and are answered, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'"

"Nay, then, Marion Grier," said Gourlay who, however much he might shake his own head over Simon's delinquencies was in no mind to have others condemn him, "might it not be rather that to one, who, I grant ye, may not be too weel acquaint with Him, the Lord would say, 'Come ye ben, Simon laddie, I was a prisoner and ye—*helpit me to gae free?*'"

Simon opened his eyes at that. "Eh?" said he, "I thought you were looking for lodgings, David? What d'ye mean?"

"May be I was," said Gourlay, "may be I was; but I am no the only pair o' eyes in Dumfries."

"Nor the only tongue that wags, evidently," said his master; and to himself he thought, 'The sooner I am out of this place the better.' Then he looked at Mistress Grier. "I am afraid I have given you a deal of trouble, madam, but I will try not to offend you again with my careless speech."

She put a strong arm under his shoulders and eased him into a more comfortable position as if he had been a child. "It is no me ye are offending," she said, and gave him the broth. "As to trouble, I have been proud to serve one of your grandfather's family, for ever since I was a wean I have heard tell of him from my mother who was a waiting maid at Kells in your grandmother's time. I mind your father too, a wild lad but kindly; you are like him."

Her grim face softened a little as she stood looking down at him; women, even the dourest of them, could seldom resist the appeal of Simon's smile.

From her mother, a little old woman who looked more like an ivory image than a living creature as she sat propped in her bed, her stiffened knees drawn almost to her chin, Simon heard something of their story.

They had been well-to-do folk in a plain way, for Grier, a linen draper, had been 'weel likit and respec'it' as his widow proudly remembered; and after his death many a travelling merchant and bonnet laird had been glad to stop the night at Widow Grier's, where he was sure of a clean bed and a well-cooked meal, when kept too late over his business in Dumfries to risk the dark roads and over-fed rivers of his homeward journey. One of these same bonnet lairds, a douce widower and an elder of the Kirk, had come not only to lodge but later to court, and Marion who was 'nae sae ill-favoured ten years syne,' her mother confided, had listened to his wooing. They were to have been married in the summer of '62, but even before that the troubles had begun. The worthy minister of Troqueer had been ejected. "I can see his wee bairns now, coming across the Brig in the horse creels, and ane o' them crying out to the passers-by, 'We're banish't, we're banish't,' puir lambies," the old woman said, smiling through her tears at the remembrance. Marion's laird had stood by his minister, and slowly by fines and quarterings his house and gear had been eaten up and himself driven desperate (no days these for marrying and

giving in marriage) till at last he had thrown in his lot with those who sought to enforce their petition by arms and, luckier than many, had fallen and died at Pentland.

"But why?" asked Simon, sitting by the old woman's bedside whence he could catch through the window a glimpse of the Nith and the Brigend. "Why need he have rammed his head against the law?"

"Sir, he had taken a solemn oath and covenant before God. Could he break that at any man's telling?"

"The law defended him if he did; he was no longer responsible for former oaths."

She shook her head. "And think ye Marion's man would be one to put off his responsibility like that?"

Simon remembered Lauderdale's avowed willingness to swallow a cartload of oaths rather than be driven from his place, and all unbidden came a picture of Charles's satirical face as he put pen to the Dover Treaty which broke England's plighted word. These men were his friends and even now he was homesick for the life they represented; yet something in his inmost being paid unwilling tribute to Marion's man, fanatic though he might be. While she talked the old woman's thin hands were busy knitting the grey ribbed hose by the sale of which she helped to support herself, selling them to the merchant who had succeeded her husband. "I bless God in His mercy that I am no a' thegither helpless, and if you will believe it, sir, I could na' knit a garter till after I was laid by. Its just wonderfu' how the loss o' ae thing teaches you anither."

It was not from her but from Davie he learnt how hardly they themselves had been hit by the bad times, suffering both quartering and fining for the hearing of outed ministers and non-attendance at church. It was not indeed until such attendance had become obviously impossible for the mother that the daughter had been left in some sort of peace, though not even then until the house had been picked as bare as they

now saw it. Many of their old clients too were ruined, while others thought it best to avoid bringing suspicion upon themselves by frequenting a suspected house, so that lodgers were now few.

"They have been down from barracks already to inquire about you," Davie added, "but" (with a chuckle) "I just told them your name and who ye were and that ye were on 'Private Business,' and wi' that I gave my head a bit nod and my eye a bit wink, and away they went, thinking maybe it was the King's affairs, God forgie me."

"Good L—," began Simon angrily, and remembering Marion, swallowed the invocation. That his comings and goings must be accounted for to a set of underlings was a new and most displeasing idea, and added to his resolve to be quit of the place as soon as might be.

Before he left, however, he went into the town to buy a shawl for old Mistress Grier, and a barrel of wine and a cured ham, with which to eke out the inadequate bill which was all Marion would present. He had hardly gone three steps down the High Street, before he was accosted by the Lieutenant who greeted him with a mixture of mystery and knowingness which he could only suppose the result of David's nods and winks. Having, however, hidden his annoyance and answered the inquiries as to his health with due politeness, he asked in turn, as the Lieutenant still lingered, whether he had recaptured his prisoner. The smirk on the young man's face changed to a scowl. "No, sir, we did not, and well for him too, for it is short shrift he would have had ; we lost a man over his rescue."

"Lost a man ?" Simon was momentarily puzzled then, "D'you mean to say the old fellow got away too ?"

"Did you not know ?" The Lieutenant looked at him, half suspicious of mockery. "He was rescued in the Enterkin ; I told you these fellows gave us no end of trouble."

"So it would seem," said Kelston dryly.

Both Marion and David had shaken their heads when Simon announced, upon his return, that the following night he intended to sleep in his own house of Kells; but it was in vain that they pointed out that scarce a week ago he had been at death's door, that there were nigh thirty miles of hill country between him and Kells House, and that the weather was broken and promised worse. He only laughed at them, telling Marion he would be a disgrace to her nursing if he could not ride thirty miles, and bidding David cease murmuring at the shortened days and have the horses at the door, with valises strapped on, by daybreak.

At the bridge the next morning he had caught his rein over his right arm and turned to wave a hand to the window from behind which the two women watched, with tears in their eyes and prayer on their lips.

"The Lord's hand has been heavy upon him, tribulation and temptation loosening at his roots; but as good Mr Rutherford was wont to say, 'without tribulation and temptation we can now no more grow than herbs or corn without rain,' and he is growing, by the Lord's mercy, though he is awful ignorant, puir laddie," said the old widow.

"He is that," said Marion, but her eyes were not so severe as her words. And Simon riding on through the Brigend of Dumfries whistled as he rode, for the old woman with her stiffened knees and busy fingers had at least taught him the beginning of a lesson always worth the learning. As he must go through the rest of his life a one-handed man it behoved him to adapt himself as soon as might be to his new condition.

"If there is a man about Kells can alter a sword-belt, David," said he, "I will manage mine easier now if the scabbard hangs on my right."

It was the first reference he had made to the loss of his hand, and Davie was wise enough to agree without comment that "Maybe he might."

CHAPTER II

THE morning had dawned too brightly and by midday, when they dismounted to eat, a great bank of cloud and spurts of wind warned them of coming rain, and they had hardly started again before it was upon them, the fierce, driving rain of Galloway.

Even before it came the country through which they rode had had, to Kelston's unaccustomed eyes, a desolate air; nor was the information which David from time to time vouchsafed calculated to cheer the returning prodigal.

"Yon was a bonnie, well-doing place in the auld days; but the laird was put to the horn in '63 for no compearing before the Council, and his wife and bairns have been fair deaved out o' house and home." Or, "I mind there was an honest man, Macbirnie by name, lived in a cottage nearby here; but Marion Grier was telling me he had been laid hands on for resetting his ain nephew. The puir lad had been out at Pentland and came to his uncle for shelter; they hid him in the corn bin and he escaped later, but the good man was seized and carried to the Tolbooth o' Edinburgh. Marion thinks he was sold out to the Plantations; leastways, he never won home here."

"Dam' set of rebels I seem to be settling among," commented Simon, leaning forward to shake the rain from his hat brim. But David answered him dryly:

"No rebels, Kells, just douce, Presbyterian folk like oorsels, only, maybe, no just sae soople in the conscience and without His Majesty's permit in their pockmanties."

Anxious to shorten the way as much as possible for his master, Gourlay had chosen the direct drover's track rather than the longer but more frequented route by Kilwhamedy and Shimers; but he had not counted on this blinding rain and the mists that swirled, rising and falling among the hills. They had ridden some

sixteen miles and forded more than one stream when he drew up with an oath, immediately uncovering to ask forgiveness for his lapse.

"I am feared we are a bit off the road," he explained to Simon as he replaced his hat, peering at the mist-covered hills. "I am thinking that is Corsock wood ahead, and I was meaning to keep a wee further to the right; but it'll no matter, for we can get a bed at Corsock, I daresay, if the storm keeps on this gait, though Corsock himsel' was called to glorify God long syne, honest man."

Simon's mouth had set in the straight, dour line that Davie could guess at, though he was careful not to look.

"Sleep where you will, Gourlay. I am for Kells to-night," and he put his heels to his horse's flanks.

The animal obeyed the action; but even as it moved forward a party of men sprang out from a wooded hillock and one caught at the bridle and stayed him. Simon's arm moved to his holster in a flash and David heard him curse as once more his loss was brought sharply home to him. Before he could recover another of his assailants had grabbed at the pistols.

"We are no wanting to hurt you, sir," one of the men said civilly, "but what would you be doing at Kells to-night?"

"What the devil is that to you?" Simon asked through his clenched teeth.

"Sir, you make ower free wi' the devil's name to pass for a godly man; I doubt you are bent upon no righteous errand."

"Awa wi' your nonsense," called David from behind. For a two-armed man, thought Simon angrily, he had let himself be mighty easily overpowered. "He is just Kells himself and making for his own house."

"Kells himself?" said the young man who had possessed himself of the pistols, "that is a likely tale, sirs, seeing there has no been a laird of Kells since I was a babe."

David's retort, whatever it was, was drowned, for at that moment a horseman rode up, asking what was the matter.

"It is a gentleman and his servant," he was answered, "as they came through we heard him say he must get to Kells to-night."

The horseman, who was better dressed than his companions though he, too, wore the blue bonnet of a countryman, looked at Kelston frowningly. "A soldier by his looks," he said shortly and added, "the sermon is nearly over, best bring him in and hear what the minister advises." He turned his horse's head but paused as Kelston addressed him. "If you have any authority, sir, had you not better consult your own common sense, which will tell you that to waylay and disarm peaceable travellers is apt to be a hanging matter?"

"It is, sir, a hanging matter to worship God in this poor land," the other replied, "therefore it behoves us to take precautions; if these be, in your case, unnecessary, you will presently go upon your way unharmed; but we will not give you leave to bring the soldiers upon us until we too be ready to depart." So saying, he turned and led the way. Simon, interested in spite of himself, followed, an armed countryman walking on either side, while Gourlay similarly escorted brought up the rear.

As they came through the wood a sound reached their ears, startling in this desolate place, the more strange to Kelston because it brought to his mind's eye a picture long forgotten—a white-washed kirk, where a grave and seemly congregation joined in the praise of God, and a little lad in the laird's loft followed literally the statement of the psalm as his gaze wandered out through the unglazed window beside him: 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes.' The turn of the ground brought them in sight of the present congregation, a strange one to find in this rain-swept hollow of the moors. Men, women and a few children, their plaids about them, followed the leading of the precentor, their voices blending in the

solemn harmony. Half-unconsciously repeating the words as they came back to him, Simon could not but be struck with their appropriateness to an assembly such as this :

“I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid,
My safety cometh from the Lord
Who heaven and earth hath made.”

The psalm ended, a tall old man, whose figure was somehow familiar, stepped forward and with raised hands blessed the people, the men uncovering. There was a moment of devout silence, and then quietly and in order the people began to disperse ; only some half-dozen, evidently men of more standing, came about the minister.

The leader of Kelston's captors had dismounted and gone forward too, now he returned, bringing the old man with him. As they approached, Simon recognised the prisoner of Dumfries.

“I regret, sir,” the minister began, and once more Simon was struck by the quiet, cultured voice, “that you should have been delayed upon your journey, but I trust you will bear us out that no harm has been done to you, nor will we keep you longer than just to give these poor people time to disperse quietly to their homes. They be hungry sheep in sore need of refreshment, but the Lord has blessed us greatly this day.” He stopped, looking intently at Kelston. “I think, sir, I have seen you but lately ?” He seemed to be searching his mind ; but Simon, who had no desire to be recognised, did not help him. His captor, however, unwittingly supplied the clue. “I said he was a soldier ; if he be that one who struck at you when bound then surely the Lord has delivered him into our hand for vengeance.” He took a step toward Simon but the minister laid a restraining hand upon his arm. “James, James, Satan hath desire to sift you when he puts such thoughts into your mind. ‘Vengeance is mine saith the Lord.’ Yet you do show me in truth where I have seen this gentleman

before. A widow's blessing," he went on, turning to Kelston, "follows you, for your kindly act to her child. Nay, then, I say no more." He smiled, and the smile lit up the stern old face and the eyes that searched Simon's had in them a half-humorous compassion.

"Put the gentleman upon his road, Logan," he said to the man who held Kells' bridle. "The day is a bad one and the moors bewildering for strangers and such," he added, turning to Kelston, "I take you to be? God His mercy have you in His keeping, young sir," and taking the arm of him he had addressed as James the minister turned away.

Night fell as they rode splashing through Ken's ford, no easy crossing, for the rains had brought the water down in some force. There was no moon but once across Ken David needed neither light nor guide, he was in his own country and knew every step of the way. A kind of exaltation had come upon Gourlay. Simon could hear him murmuring snatches of psalms and talking to himself as he rode; his long exile was over and he was home. But Simon, his hat pushed well down and his cloak collar about his ears, followed in gloomy silence.

They entered a narrow glen, an eerie place it seemed on such a night. Somewhere below them they could hear a mountain burn swollen by the rain, and presently crossing it they took a moorland track. Suddenly David drew up with a sharp exclamation.

"God save us! They have made bonnie preparation for ye, Kells. Look yonder."

Simon, once again shaking the rain from his hat, followed the direction of David's finger. Ahead of them, a blacker patch in the night, stood out the house of his fathers, but from windows and door light streamed forth.

"An illumination truly, but who told them of our coming? Whom, indeed, is there to tell?"

Then as they rode up, voices and hoarse laughter broke the stillness,

"Save us!" said David again. "It is the soldiers!" He would have drawn rein but Simon pressed on. "What will you do?" asked David as his master passed him.

"Clear my house," said Kells, and rode into the yard.

A man had sprung forward to bar Kelston's road as he entered but had moved aside at his imperious, "Out of the way, sirrah."

The door stood ajar; there was no need for knocking. Simon swung himself from his saddle, threw his rein to David, and strode across the hall where the men were. They looked up, their laughter dying to silence, but no one moved to stop him. Remembrance of the place had come back clearly, he needed no telling as to where the officers would be; a few steps up from the end of the hall, along a passage in the new part of the house built some eighty years before, was the parlour.

As he pushed open the door the chink of coins reached his ear. Two men were at cards, a bottle of wine stood between them, and another lay empty on the floor. Simon had time to notice a rather strained look in the face of the player who sat opposite to him before the young fellow, looking up, saw a stranger and sprang to his feet.

"Your business, sir?"

"I might ask you the same and with more reason, seeing this be my house you make free with."

"Oh," said the young officer, his face clearing, "are you Mr Kelston? I had word of your coming but never thought to see you on such a night. We meant to clear out of your house this very morning."

As he spoke there was the sound of a stool scraped on the floor; the man with his back to Kelston had half risen, but at the name he had sunk back again. The other went on, "There were really only a few of us until De Morgan brought over his troop to-day."

"Tch!" said Kelston through shut teeth. Then,

"That Mr De Morgan should seek the hospitality of my house is indeed an unexpected revelation of his Chr-r-istian character."

"I did not know it was yours nor am I here as your guest." De Morgan had stumbled to his feet and stood biting his nails and glowering at the floor before him.

"Ah? In that case, as the laws of hospitality do not bind me——" Simon stepped back and reopened the door. He held it with his left hand, and to De Morgan there was something sinister in the way the other was thrust into the pocket of his coat. His throat tightened as though he felt again the strength of those hidden fingers.

He hesitated, trying to summon his dignity. The younger man looked from the one to the other perplexed. "It is a long ride to St John's clachan," he began, but De Morgan interrupted him.

"I am due there in any case to-night and" (with a show of bluster) "I would not lie in this fellow's house." He swept the money before him into his pocket, aware of Kelston's slightly raised brows; it seemed to him that his enemy's sword arm twitched as he neared the door; the hand was not withdrawn, nevertheless De Morgan's step involuntarily quickened.

"You will pay for this some day," he snarled under his breath, and pulling his hat further over his brows he passed out, and they heard him clatter down the stairs shouting orders and curses at his men.

Still Simon waited, listening, and the young officer stood silent too, fingering the cards uncertainly and looking askance at this new-comer, astonished at his uncanny power over a man who, in the few months he had been with the Dragoons, had already made himself heartily disliked as a bully and a ruffler.

"This needs must have some explanation, sir," he said at last, as the stamping of horses' feet and the clatter of departure died away. Simon closed the door and, throwing off his wet cloak, drew a chair to the table and sat down. Now that he was really home he found himself suddenly mighty fatigued.

Filling a glass for himself he pushed the bottle across the table. "Sit down," he said, "there will have to be some explanation on your side also, my friend. Is there war in the land that you quarter yourself thus and no leave asked?"

"War?" the young fellow broke out, "I wish there were; this hunting of Whigs is a miserable business for a gentleman. We should have been out to-day—that is why De Morgan was here, his troop is across the water—but it was such a day of rain he thought they would not meet, though we had word of a preaching. What is your power over him?" he stopped to ask.

"If there is no war you have not yet answered my question," Kelston smiled at him.

Young Telfer shrugged his shoulders. "The house was empty except for the old woman who, with due respect, Mr Kelston, is none too loyal, and quartering is still pretty general here."

Simon lifted his glass, sipped, and put it down with a grimace.

"Where is my housekeeper? Surely Kells House can provide something more drinkable than this; and besides, I am hungry."

The young soldier rose, his face flushing. "I—I am afraid she is locked up," he said. "De Morgan did not trust her and I forgot. Bryant!" he shouted.

At the name a sergeant lounged in, but came smartly to attention with sidelong eye on Kells; for all he knew this new-comer might be some one in authority.

"Unlock the old woman and send her here, and Bryant, move my things from the daïs chamber and have it made ready for Mr Kelston."

"No," said Simon, "there is a smaller room in the turret if I remember rightly, 'twill do well enough for me; but let my housekeeper out at once."

He got up, crossed to the fireplace, and stood looking into the embers.

"De Morgan thought she was sending out warnings,"

Telfer said apologetically. "These people are damned difficult to manage; it will be different now you are back, you'll make 'em conform, of course?"

Kelston gave him no answer; he was trying to recall Euphan Morrison as she had been nigh on twenty years ago. She had seemed an old woman to him then; he knew now she could have been little over middle age; a big fair woman, not talkative. There were those who called her dour even in those days and young Sandy, who was her nephew, had feared her; but to the lonely little boy who was her master's son she had been the nearest person to a mother he had ever known.

He heard Telfer's voice say, "Come in, woman, your master is home," and turning swiftly, saw her in the doorway. She was an old woman in reality now, thin and wrinkled but upright still, and facing her persecutors with a cold pride that hid the fire beneath. Kelston crossed the room and took her hand in his. Tall as he was, she was near as tall as he.

"Do ye mind Sim Kelston, Eppie?" he said, dropping into the kindly Scots that David had never let him quite forget. "He was but a wee lad when you saw him last."

He felt her hand tremble in his as she raised her deep-set, weary eyes and looked at him long and earnestly.

"Aye, I mind ye, Kells. Ye've grown big of stature like your sire and your good-sire before you, but—ye have still the eyes of the bairn that used to be. God grant ye His Saving Grace."

"Amen," said Kells gently.

"It is a bitter welcome ye have had wi' me who should have been makin' ready for you lockit i' the store cupboard," she said, and cast a fierce look round for her tormentor.

"Faith, the gentleman that ordered that will not trouble us in a hurry," Kells assured her. "As for our other—guest, we must do our best to make him comfortable during the short time he will be with us. I do not know if he has supped but Davie and I have

not. Do you think you can find us something to eat, woman? To-morrow there will be time for talk."

Her eyes came back to his face with a hungry wistfulness and she nodded. "It's not much is left us these days; but I'll make shift to find you something to eat—and drink," she added, with a glance of veiled scorn at the bottles on the table.

David had come in while they were speaking; he carried his master's travelling trunk and waited further orders. He and Euphan had looked at each other on his entering, a queer, meaning look, but neither spoke word to the other and you might have thought they had parted some half-hour since, and not have guessed it near twenty years.

"I have supped, but Bryant will do your bidding, mistress; make use of him," Telfer said, to which she gave him no answer, passing out like a queen. Bryant and Davie followed her, and the two men were left once more alone. Simon had gone back to the fire; the sight of this old woman moved him profoundly.

"It is not a pleasant business this hunting one's own country-folk," Telfer said presently.

"Damned unpleasant, I should think." The faint note of scorn roused the younger man. "Well, they are traitors and rebels," he said more defiantly. "You must not forget Pentland."

Kelston wheeled on him, "Good God! Pentland was four years ago. They must be tough lads if it has taken you all this time to settle that." Then once more weariness overcame him and his wrath died.

"I am sorry to have spoilt your game," he said with a yawn. Then remembering the pile of gold before De Morgan, "though maybe it was as well?" he quizzed.

The young man laughed ruefully. "Yes, he is too lucky a player for me," he admitted, his hands seeking his empty pockets. He did not ask again why Simon had so summarily dismissed his companion.

"Then as you say you have supped, if you will pardon me, I'll to bed and sup there," and with a friendly nod Simon went to find David.

In the turret room which he had chosen Eppie had

done her best for his comfort. It was the room in which, after his father had gone to the war, he had slept as a child, and she had, it seemed, always kept it aired and ready for his return. Now, wrapped in a furred gown that had been his grandfather's, he enjoyed the excellent meal she had, for all her apologies, produced for him. Salmon and baked pigeons he told her were a feast for a king. His appreciation reached its height, however, when he tasted the wine she sent up for him. "How the devil has she kept this from those thieving rogues below stairs?" he asked David who stood watching him with expectant delight.

"Isn't she just a wonder? I'm telling ye, Kells, yon woman is grand; she put all the ord'nar wine in the outer cellar where the ale is kept, and when they asked for the key she made sic a pother that they thought that was all and never jaloused she had all your grandfather's cellar of bi-ord'nar fine wine hidden from them."

David slapped his knee, chuckling, and then remembered himself in haste.

"Convey my thanks to her, Davie," his master said, "and list ye, ask her to take a bottle of this same claret, with my compliments, to Mr Telfer, now our guest."

David's face fell. "After her saving it for you would you go wasting it on a quartering dragoon?" he asked in pained surprise. "She'll no like that." But his master was adamant. "If she be the woman I take her for, she will know the difference between saving her master's wine from thieves and giving it to her master's guests. Do as you are bid, Gourlay."

He was right. Euphan received the order with a quick lift of the head and a gleam of pleasure in her sombre eyes. "There speaks your true Kelston, David Gourlay, and I'd have been real put about if he had sat there drinking it himsel' wi'out a thought for the honour of his house; but he's his father's son. And to-morrow ye will tell me of how ye have carried out your trust, in keeping him also a son of Grace, in these little better than heathen lands where he has been reared."

CHAPTER III

SIMON awoke next morning with the sun glinting in at the turret window. Sun? He must indeed have slept late! He sat up and looked about the room, adjusting the memories that surged back upon him from each long-forgotten but familiar object. That oak chest, for instance, on which David had laid his clothes; he remembered its three carved panels and the face that looked out from the top of the centre arch, not a real face he realised now, but like enough to be turned into the hobgoblin of a small boy's imagination. Simon shut his eyes and saw the chair which Eppie had brought up for him occupied by a thin, erect, old figure, white hands folded over the cane between his knees, his silvery beard flowing over that furred gown which lay, where his grandson had tossed it off last night, over the back of the now empty chair. Simon Kelston. He had died when young Simon was six years old, yet now in his old home he seemed to live again. It was he, rather than John his son, who had left his impress on the House of Kells. His father came into the reminiscences of the people as a youth, good-natured and likeable; but it was the old man who had sat in that chair whose spirit still ruled Kells.

The house was strangely still. A jug of ale and some freshly made bannocks, carefully buttered, had been placed by his bedside; but David was nowhere to be seen. Simon ate and drank and began to dress; it was slow work, but he was determined to make himself independent and here was a good opportunity. He had always accustomed himself in fencing to use his left hand and this stood him in good stead. Had every one slept late he wondered; the house was uncommon quiet. Twisting his cravat into some sort of a knot he put on his hat and went downstairs. The hall was empty; he crossed it, descended a second flight of steps, and passed through the courtyard; the soldiers had gone.

Passing the outer gate Simon stopped, still and amazed. Before him lay a world washed and innocent as a child on a Saturday night ; across the bogs a sweet-scented air blew pleasantly and behind a long low hill of burnished bronze the Rhinns rose, blue and vivid. The builder of Kells had chosen well. Windswept and desolate it might be on a winter's night, but on this autumn morning few more beautiful spots could have been found. Simon walked slowly round his house. To the north a rocky hill shut him off from the valley, on the other three sides the moors swept away, golden in the sunlight. The house stood high, but in every direction the hills rose, guarding his privacy yet in no way overshadowing or diminishing his sense of space ; it was as if he stood on the top of the world, seeing yet unseen, viewing earth and heaven.

Here and there in the distance was a little clachan of houses or some single homestead ; from his yesterday's experience Simon knew how sordid and desolate many of these were, but across the unseen valley their smoke had a homely and comfortable look, and from somewhere near at hand came the low bleating of sheep. Everywhere land and sky were full of colour ; the rich golden browns of the bracken, the blues and purples of the distant hills, and the scarlet splash of an autumn-tinted rowan. On Simon's heart there fell a sudden peace. He lifted his head, breathing the scented air, and looked at the blue sky overhead, blue as the Madonna's robe in the picture at St Cloud—blue as *her* robes may be ? For the first time since that fateful 21st of August he could think of her apart from the dreadful pageantry of St Denis. It was almost as if she stood by him, almost as if he heard the soft rustle of her gown, would in a moment feel her touch upon his arm. He stood, not daring to move, all his being strung up ; then, with something between a laugh and a sigh, the soft wind kissed his cheek and passed. He was alone again—alone, yet the awful gnawing loneliness of these past days was gone. Was it her spirit or the spirit only, of his

own land ? He did not know ; but his heart was strangely peaceful as he turned back and entered his house once more.

Eppie was standing in the doorway. "The sodgers are gone," she told him. "The officer lad wanted to see you ; but you were still asleep, so he left a message with Gourlay ; and Gourlay's gone to the New Town to see if your luggage has come on by the carrier, he thought he could go and come before you would need him." She looked him over gravely and then as if it were a matter of course, she put up her hands and deftly retied the lace cravat at his neck. "There," she said, "now you'll do fine," and her sad old face relaxed into a smile of wonderful tenderness. "Ye mustna' mind an auld woman that nestled you as a babe, Kells," she said wistfully.

"He's come back to you rather a broken man, Eppie," he answered with a rueful laugh.

Her face grew stern again at that. "'Better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into Hell.' Was it the Lord's business you were doing when this thing came upon you ? "

His face, too, had grown grim. "That depends on your meaning," he said slowly, "for in one sense that is just what I was doing. 'Vengeance is mine,' that is how it goes, is it not ? and—He brooked not my interference."

"Then ye may thank Him indeed," she said quietly and with a swift change of tone. "I have laid out the Bible in the Hall, and if you are ready, sir, I will e'en give the bell a bit pull and call in the men."

"Yes," said Kells, "I had best see them at once, I suppose ; you will want help now."

"Aye, and they are expecting you to lead them in the morning exercises as your good-father, faithful man, and your father after him were baith wont to do. To-day, surely, they will desire to praise His Name who has brought ye among them at this time."

"Best wait and see if it's a matter for praise," he

said lightly. And with no relish for the prospect ahead added in apology, "I was not trained to the ministry." For his grandfather he knew had sent his father to college with some hope of his following this calling.

"Ministry!" she caught him up scornfully, "are ye a papist, Kells, that ye cannot offer your own thanksgivings to the Lord or pray for His blessing wi'out the aid of a minister?" Then her face grew dark and she pointed past him, "If so be it is a chaplain ye want, here comes one will be proud to do your bidding," and with that she turned from him into the house.

Simon looked back and saw a short, thick-set young man entering the yard on a pony.

"Hi! Mistress Morrison, William, is there none of you tamned uncivil folk will come and hold my horse? Where is Mr Telfer or Captain De Morgan? Hi, there, I say." Then catching sight of the tall gentleman in the doorway, "Oh! sir, I peg your pardon."

"Can I do anything for your reverence?" Simon asked good-naturedly as the fat little man scrambled off his pony.

"You will be Colonel Douglas, I suppose. I heard he was expected. I did not see you in the doorway or I would not have disturbed you with my shouting, for I am a chentleman, sir; I know what is what; but the people here are Whigs and most uncivil. I am Mr Macpherson the curate out by, at your honour's service. There is only an old indulged callant here at Kells, and so I ride over when the soldiers are here to drink a glass of ale to his Majesty's health and show my duty. This is a fery ill-affected countryside, sir, I regret to inform you, fery ill-affected—and it is a dry road across the moors, your worship," he ended with a sheepish grin.

Simon laughed. "Euphan," he called, "bring a cup of wine to his reverence; we cannot have it said Kells is less hospitable since the troopers are gone."

"Gone? Oh, but that will just be to raid up the Whigs; they will be back to-night, I doubt not. There was a tamned conventicle somewhere up Corsock way only yesterday I will be hearing. A word in your honour's ear," he leaned forward and touched Simon's arm confidentially, "the old wife here is the worst. Oh, thank you, Mistress Morrison, thank you." This with an abrupt change of tone as he caught sight of her returning with the wine.

Simon took it from her and handed it to the curate. "Is it not a little indiscreet, Mr Macpherson, to offer confidences without first ascertaining to whom they are addressed?" The curate's face came out of the wine cup rather round-eyed. "But are you not Colonel Douglas?"

"He is not," snapped Euphan. "He is the laird of Kells, and the sooner your bonnet is off your head the better, John Hielan'man."

The curate's jaw dropped as he clawed at his hat; the mysterious laird of Kells was a great man in London, as all the countryside knew. "I pèg your pardon," he stammered; then, encouraged by Simon's easy laugh, "you will doubtless be wanting a chaplain, sir, I will pe fery proud."

"Thank ye, no; the indulged gentleman at Kells will do all I need," Kelston said lightly, and as the curate's face looked his astonishment, "I am, you see, a Presbyterian—a 'tamned Whig,' in fact!"

"A Presbyterian?" The curate stared, then slowly but with deliberate intent he replaced his bonnet. A great man the master of Kells might be in London; but here in the West Country, if he were really a Presbyterian, he had best look to himself. The curate had known greater men than Kells brought to ruin for less insolently avowed principles.

"Mr Cant will be fery pleased to see you, no doubt," he said, and his voice had lost its fawning. "Fery pleased inteed, but if you are really a Presbyterian, sir, I would remind you that you will do well to have no one but your own household at your services;

otherwise you will be coming under the Act. Conventicles are fery punishable in this land, I would remind you."

"Thank ye for your warning," Kelston said with no apparent loss of good humour. "If that be the case I fear I cannot press you to stay longer as I am about to worship with my household," and with a careless nod he turned on his heel and went in.

Euphan moved swiftly forward and caught the curate by the sleeve as he stood glowering after his departing host.

"Gin ye daur bring harm on him," she whispered fiercely, and left her threat unfinished.

The curate shrank before the fire in her eyes. "Witch," he muttered and shook himself from her grasp, "I will have at you yet." But as he clambered on to his pony and rode away he was already wondering if he had not been a fool to quarrel with the laird of Kells so soon.

CHAPTER IV

FOR the next few months Simon lived like a hermit. Except for Mr Cant, the minister, and an occasional visit from young Telfer, who rode across to give him the gossip of the neighbourhood over a glass of wine, he saw no one but his own people.

Old Morrison, his grandfather's house-steward, was dead, but his place had been taken by his son William, a brother of young Sandy's, and to him and to Euphan, Simon left the ordering of his house and engaging of such servants as seemed necessary. His wants were simple and for the time being he was glad to be alone. It was a new experience and he was young enough to enjoy new experiences and sufficiently a Scot to feel the lure of his own land.

Two days after his return Euphan had come to him in the wainscoted parlour, an old leather-bound book in her hands. "It is your good-sire's Diary," she said, laying it reverently on the table before

him. "I found it after you went to France and I was feared to send it to you ; it seemed best to keep it till you came back, and indeed, I did not think I would have to keep it so long a while."

The book was fastened by a brass lock but Euphan had the key of this and laid it beside him.

When she had gone he sat for some time looking at the outside of the old volume, picturing again the man who had written in it ; it was curious how his grandfather's presence still pervaded his home. In his wanderings his grandson had almost forgotten that the old man had existed ; now it was as if he had returned to find the former Simon still master of his house. He even hesitated to open the volume, so strong and alive was its late owner's personality. Shaking off the feeling he fitted the key and with some difficulty set the book open. As he did so his eyes fell on his father's name, and interested he read on : "To-day is my son John betrothed to Mistress Catherine Gordon, niece to my old friend of Earlshope. May God in His great mercy give me to see light upon this union. I had hoped it might be Jean, lass to my good-brother Robert Douglas, who would be my son's bride ; but Robert, having put worldly advancement before his duty to Almighty God, and I, having written to him in straight terms anent the same, he has resented my plain dealing and refused my son. Yea, and is it not written, 'Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan' ? I thank Thee, O Lord, for this word strengthening my heart. With war so imminent it is right that the lad be wed, and Mistress Catherine is a godly young woman, well grounded in the Scriptures and not ill-favoured."

The son of Catherine Gordon felt a touch of pity for the girl thus commended but so little desired. And the other ? Why, she was the lass with the hazel eyes, Ann Kennedy's mother ! He leaned back in his chair and for the first time for many months thought of Ann ; she had his miniature, he had asked her to keep it till he returned to claim it. Did she wonder that he never wrote ? She had been kind to

him that night, this cousin, whose mother, he thought with a flash of whimsical amusement, might have been his own. Truly, Mistress Ann would have made a pleasant little sister.

There was an old quill fixed to the book; he took it out now and tried it awkwardly. He had never been much of a correspondent, having indeed few people to whom to write; now it was impossible. With a shrug he put back the pen and went on reading :

“*27th June 1640*,—To-day I have ridden to Cullenoch to a meeting of the war committee. Larg is chosen president. We considered the Act anent provision of the troupe horses. Carsfairne, Dalry, Balmaclellan, and my own men will ride under Kenmure and Earlston. My heart is saddened that it should have come to this, yet the King hath made treaties of no avail, and it behoveth us to defend the Lord’s cause manfully, even as it is written. Numbers xxxii. 20.

“ ‘ If ye will go armed before the Lord to war . . . until the land be subdued before the Lord, then afterwards ye shall return and be guiltless before the Lord.’ ”

Simon turned to the beginning of the book, some three years earlier. There may have been a former volume. This, at least, began without apology or preamble of any sort.

“*July 2nd, 1637*,—To-day Mr Dickson has brought to me the new service book. He cannot see his way to read the same. I have besought the Lord earnestly for guidance, being unwilling to go against the King his authority, yet in this matter and after long prayer it is borne in upon me that Mr Dickson is right and that I may not press upon him to do other than refuse this book. The ceremonies contained therein do depart greatly from the worship and reformation of our Kirk, being more in accordance with the Kirk of Rome for her superstition and idolatry in worship; moreover, the book has not been warranted by General Assembly, which is the representative of this Kirk.

I have promised him that I will ride into Edinburgh this coming week, there to enquire further into the matter, for it is said many towns are petitioning the Council against the book and the articles. I pray the King may withdraw the same, for the people will not easily submit.

“As I finished my morning duties, there came to me Mistress Jean Douglas, niece to my deare wife, desiring I would permit that she rides with my son to the Blackwater which he has a mind to fish. She is a fair child and winning. Young Gourlay will ride with them.”

Simon smiled, remembering how Mistress Jean's daughter wheedled him into doing her will when she would have him eat and sleep; it would seem hazel eyes were not the only inheritance she had from her mother. He turned a few pages, filled for the most part with details anent the estate and observations upon Mr Dickson's sermons, pausing over the account of his grandfather's visit to Edinburgh.

Even through the bare statements of fact, or the short, precise comments set down in the neat, already fading handwriting, Simon could feel something of the stir and passion of those great days when Scotland, united as she has seldom been before or since, rose to defend her liberties and assert her rights. The elder Kelston had been in St Giles's, on the 23rd of July when the tumult against the service-book had brought the people's discontent to a head; had watched the resentment against Laud turn even more hotly upon the Scottish Bishops who, never more than tolerated, were now believed to have sold their country to English interference from mere greed of power. He had lingered on in Edinburgh with scores of others, nobles, gentlemen, ministers, who, coming to petition, waited on to hear the King's answer, and commented sadly when that foolish reply came, bringing not peace, but a sword.

“His Majesty followeth in the footsteps of Rehoboam, King of Judah, when he thinks to quiet just grievances by adding to their weight. Surely the

people will not love the service-book the more because Mr Gillespie's pamphlet against it is ordered to be burnt at the cross, nor that the Council is removed from Edinburgh to Dundee? His Majesty is ill-advised in this matter; I pray God he suffers not for it."

He had been appointed one of the Commissioners chosen by the supplicating party to meet the Council, and was from this time on much in touch with men whose names were to become household words in Scotland. Henderson he loved and revered: 'a grave, pious, and learned man.' Warriston he admired for his undoubted ability but feared his vehemence and crotchety spirit; on others his comments were shrewd, though seldom other than kindly. He had been home in December and January, but was called back to Edinburgh in February of '38 by word of the King's Proclamation and the intended protestation of the leaders of his own party, a protestation by which they believed themselves kept within the law by their demand to present their grievances direct to their Sacred Sovereign the King.

Will Morrison came to call Simon to his dinner; but later in the afternoon, sitting in his grandfather's chair before a great fire of peats, with a bottle of the old gentleman's claret and a pipe filled for him by Davie, Simon returned once more to the perusal of the book and read with ever-growing interest the description of the drafting, amending, and signing in Greyfriars' Kirk of the great National Covenant for the Defence of the Reformed Protestant religion and of civil liberty.

'From the knowledge and conscience of our duty to God, to our King and country, so far as human infirmity will suffer, wishing a further measure of the grace of God for this effect, we promise and swear by the Great Name of the Lord our God to continue in the Profession and Obedience of the aforesaid Religion.'

Once more Simon leaned back in his chair and sent out a long column of smoke to join the blue peat

smoke of the fire. Nominally bred a Presbyterian and taking a half mischievous pride in a name that scandalised the older courtiers, while it served its owner as a means of escape from the long Court sermons under which the King and the younger members of his household groaned or slept, Simon had in reality very little knowledge of the points at issue; and bored at times by David's rhapsodies, he had grown secretly to believe more and more in Hudibras's description of the Presbyterians as mere rebels and revolutionaries, men who

“Call fire and sword and desolation
A godly thorough reformation,
Which always must be carried on,
And still be doing, never done;
As if religion were intended
For nothing else but being mended.”

Here in this straightforward narrative, put down without thought of effect, in a spirit, humble in its elation and sincere in its loyalty, was another side of the picture.

It was all very well for the Cavaliers, who had seen the foundations of their world reft from below their feet, to cling blindly to old loyalties and prate of the divinity of kings. Simon had known many of them in his childhood, and their simple integrity and high honour had influenced him more than he was aware. But they were of a past generation. Their sons had eagerly pieced together the shattered pageant of their old world; but they had cared little for old loyalties and were equally scornful of new. They might talk as readily as their fathers of the supreme power of the King, but their talk was based on Hobbes and convenience rather than on Divine Right. They had no more intention than Charles himself of going again upon their travels; the Divinity which had hedged the King was a dying, if not an already dead, God.

Young Simon, modern courtier to his finger-tips, was far less shocked by his grandfather having withstood the King, than amazed at a belief strong enough

to drive him against all his instincts and desire into such a withstanding.

It reminded him of the Duchess of York and her conversion—or perversion—to Rome, though he smiled to think how horrified either would have been at the comparison. In both was a conviction driving them out of themselves, a loyalty so insistent that all others must bow to it.

“All that is mine, all that is the King’s, let it remain the King’s,” the elder Simon had written; “but Cæsar may not usurp the place nor the prerogative of the Most High God. I pray Him that at all times He keep my heart clean in this matter; that I act with judgment and in His fear.”

Simon knocked the ash from his pipe and found David at his elbow to refill it; he would never have felt the loss of his hand if Gourlay could have helped it. His servant’s tireless anticipation of his needs touched him, even if at times it irked his independence. Now he shook his head with a “No thank ye, Davie, I will smoke no more just now.” Then as Gourlay laid the empty pipe on the table and stooped to replenish the fire, “Is William about?”

“Oh, aye,” said David, rather sourly; he was jealous at times of those others who now shared his master.

Simon laid his hand a moment on the hunched shoulder.

“If to-morrow is fine I would like to ride to the Blackwater. You have fished there in my father’s time, have you not? Will you take me? Right. Now send William to me.”

William Morrison was tall like his aunt, with her quiet eyes and something of her grave dignity. He had been in service in Holland until his father’s failing health had called him home.

Simon pointed to a stool nearby. “If you have a few minutes to spare, Will, sit down, I want to talk to you, nay rather, I would have you talk—of Sandy.”

Morrison hesitated, though his face did not change

save for a momentary flicker of eyelids which showed him disturbed.

"I know," Simon said slowly, "that for a laird to say he knew nothing of his tenant's death till some four years after it happened is no good excuse. I should have known; I might have saved him, perhaps. Even now I know nothing but the bare fact that they hanged him."

"I doubt ye could not have saved him, sir," William answered quietly, and now he took the proffered seat. "Indeed, it was a grand death, a great privilege for one like our Sandy, who was kind of fey at best."

"But that is what I do not understand—they hanged him for rebellion. Sandy! Any child could have told that he was—was different from other folk, not responsible for his actions maybe; but rebellion——"

"You remember Sandy then, sir?" Will's chin was on his hand and his eyes dreamy. "You'll mind then how tender he was wi' all hurt things, how he would let the foxes out of the traps and the little birds from their cages? I have seen my father flog him for it, but he was aye at it again, no beast feared Sandy." He stopped, but Simon's nod invited him to go on.

"It was when the fining began and the soldiers were quartered everywhere and men began to take to the hills, for that they could not see their way to worship with the Bishop's curates and their own lawful ministers driven from the churches. Sandy used to fetch and carry for the hill folk; the soldiers thought him daft and let him be. He used to play for them and he could come and go where others dared not, so it came about that he was in St John's Town getting food for Barscobe and some others, when he met a party of soldiers driving some of the folk to thresh old Grier's corn, him that was eimie (uncle that is) to Marion Grier's father, for that he could not pay his church dues. Sandy did not like that, it frightened him to see folk driven like beasts; but that was not all. He

heard the soldiers threaten Grier they would roast him ; maybe they only said it to frighten him, but they had laid hands on him and were for putting him naked on a gridiron. That was too much for Sandy ; he was off and fetched Barscobe and the rest. They came and stopped the soldiers, but as they talked with them the other soldiers ran in with their swords drawn. At that, as I have been told, Sandy lost what head he had. He had an old pistol that had been given him to carry to one of the hill men and now he out with it and fired. There was naught in it but a broken pipe but it hurt one of the soldiers. 'Twas that started the rising, for the rest saw well enough they would be laid on to for rebels in any case and so they thought they had best make a reality of it. I was not there ; but I have heard it told many times and I believe that is the truth. You will know the rest, I dare say, sir ? How they caught Sir James Turner in Dumfries and afterwards how others joined with them, but not as many as they had hoped ; and how in the end they were broken at the Pentland Hills ? ”

“ Something of it, yes ; but the rest about Sandy. Surely they did not hang him for that ? ”

“ Not then ; but he was clean mad for a time after that, my father said. He would not leave the men, though they did their best to make him ; he must needs march with them playing his bits of Psalm tunes and whiles the air he called ‘ The Lady.’ He was with them when the fighting came at the Pentlands. The sight of blood always fleyed him, he had no thought to escape, and they caught him easy enough. Maybe they would have seen he was daftlike and let him go,” William was trying to be fair, “ but first they shut him up in a place they called Haddock’s Hole or some such name, a wee place anyway, and there were thirty or forty of them and Sandy—Sandy who had never slept under a roof, summer or winter, since he was a bairn ! The horrors came on him there. They say he had the strength of ten that day, and somehow he won out, fought the warders and broke prison ; but for God’s

mercy he might have done murder. They caught him and put him in chains, then it came out somehow about the pistol at St John's Town and there was no mercy for him after that."

"They hanged him here, at Kells?" Simon's voice was not quite steady. The picture of the mad boy with fear in his heart fighting to get out of those closing walls, hurt him; he knew something of that terror.

Will's face softened and his eyes, which had grown stern over his tale, grew dreamy again as he answered:

"Aye, I was wrong maybe to say they had no mercy, though I doubt me it was not mercy they had in their hearts who sent him here; but God His mercy is wonderful, and it made just all the difference to Sandy as I have heard my father tell. He was just breaking his heart to think he would not see the Rhinns again, and when he found he was to die here wi' his face to them, he was fair uplifted at the goodness of God."

"A warning to others, their lordships ca'ed it." Euphan's voice, deep and sudden, broke in upon her nephew's slow speech as she stood in the doorway, a lighted candle in her hand. "A warning it was indeed, though not as they meant it, to many a poor wavering soul that day, for there were few, young or old, but felt anew the Power and Goodness of Almighty God when they saw him they ca'ed 'daft Sandy' die sae joyful and triumphant wi' the twenty-first Psalm upon his lips."

William Morrison rose; he took the candle from his aunt and placed it on the table, turning to light those upon the mantel-shelf; he was the well-trained servant once more.

"We are apt to talk ower freely, Mr Kelston, sir; it is maybe because we have been so long without a master, so you will just need to excuse us." But Simon, his hand over his eyes, was hearing again the little haunting melody that Sandy had called 'The Lady', and intermingling with it the deep, rich tones of the preacher, 'I leave her to the Mercy of Almighty God in whom she trusted.'

CHAPTER V

MR LEIGHTON, the new Archbishop, or, as he preferred to call himself, Commendator, of Glasgow, was preaching in his Cathedral. His sermon was generous and deeply spiritual, but his voice was weak and carried poorly; and the students were restless and inclined towards mischief. One in particular, safely ensconced behind a pillar, had affected a shrill cough which he sent forth in spasms, to the entertainment of his fellows and the anger of the regents, who could not locate him.

"I regret I could not well hear all the preacher said, for he seemed a learned and peaceable man, though an Archbishop." The speaker, a young English Non-conformist but lately arrived, addressed Walter Kennedy, by whose side he found himself as the students trooped out into the dusk of the early spring afternoon.

"He is peaceable enough, certainly," Walter answered with a shrug. "Mr Burnet says neither the Episcopalians nor the Presbyterians appreciate him for that very reason."

"Why should they?" a third speaker broke in. "That he goes hat in hand to the Presbyterians full of promises is not like to please his own party; while the others, knowing well enough he can in no wise carry them through, are not appeased."

"To say truth," said the Englishman thoughtfully, "I have wondered at times why there are such bitter divisions in Scotland, for the worship we have just attended was in all respects managed as it might be in our own Presbyterian churches at home, for all it was performed by a bishop."

"It is the Bishops themselves who are hateful, forced upon the Kirk as they have been against all laws of God," the other answered hotly, and added, lowering his voice to a fierce whisper, "and the broken covenant."

"Whist, Robert!" Walter interrupted, alarmed at his friend's rashness. "It is not safe to talk of such things in the streets; but if you will come to my room, we have half an hour before his reverence will require us, and I have a cake the carrier brought but yesterday from my mother."

The English student thanked him but refused; he would, he said, gladly hear more of this, but had some study to look over before they met in Mr Burnet's chamber for the customary examination of the day's sermons. "Though, thanks be, he cannot expect us to know much of one we could not hear," laughed Walter as they parted.

In the safety of Kennedy's room the young man whom he had addressed as Robert condescended to a slice of excellent cake, having first dismissed the English, Conformist and Dissenter alike, in the sweeping condemnation "Erastian." He was considerably older than young Kennedy, who was flattered by his notice and confidence though by no means always in agreement with his fanatical views.

For a little, silence reigned, then Robert Hamilton spoke abruptly. "I heard from my sister of Earlston yesterday."

"Oh?" said Walter, expectant.

"There is to be a preaching towards Rutherglen ayont the Bridge."

"When?" breathed Walter.

"To-night. Do you still want to come?"

"Aye, do I." Young Kennedy's eyes were shining. It was not that he had any particular craving for further sermons; but to clamber out in the darkness, to break bounds and cross the river without being observed; to do this, too, in the company of a man near on twenty made the blood dance in one's veins. Hamilton turned his eyes slowly and let them rest on the eager young face.

"You are light and wanting in conviction; I know not if I am wiselike to take you. I hope you can be secret."

"Try me," said Walter.

"I pray God it be for the saving of your soul, but mind you, it is a solemn secret." He leaned forward and dropped his tone to a sepulchral whisper, "It is the prophet himself will be there."

"I would not let on against him, not if they try 'the Boots' on me," the boy said proudly, and squared his narrow shoulders.

"Humph!" grunted Robert.

At nine o'clock the regents made their rounds, after that silence was supposed to reign in College. Hamilton had decided to get out by Walter's window, his own being impossible; with the aid of a blanket they could reach the roof below, and from this the jutting and ruinous wall of an older building made descent comparatively easy.

It was not the first time Hamilton had been abroad at night, and the younger boy followed in amazed admiration as his companion led him with sure steps through a maze of narrow streets and across open spaces till he saw the gleam of water under the pale moonlight and knew that they were at the river. They had come out upon it well above the town, and here Hamilton stopped and blew a soft birdlike note through his fingers. From the bank another answered him, and beckoning Walter to follow him he stepped out from the shelter of a hedgerow and, crossing the intervening space, peered down to where in the shadows a boat lay moored. There were already several people in the boat and the rowers were unshipping their oars. "I thought you were not coming," one of them said as Robert gave the countersign and they climbed in. "In another moment we would have been away we are late as it is."

Hamilton explained that it had been impossible to come earlier, and after that they rowed in silence with muffled oars to a convenient landing-place on the opposite bank from which, still in silence, they proceeded cautiously upon their way.

To Walter it seemed, as it has seemed to many another conspirator before and since, that his beating heart must give warning to his enemies; he almost

expected Robert to turn and bid him quiet its noise or leave them but no one took any notice of him. A large barn on the outskirts of what seemed to be a farm-steading of considerable size was the place of meeting, and once more giving sign and countersign their party entered. The barn was already full and the service begun ; some one was praying, but Walter, crushed behind a tall, broad-backed yeoman, could neither see nor hear. The prayer ended presently, however, and there was a movement in the crowd as it spread, easing itself. Walter found himself, almost without effort of his own, pushed forward to where, between an old woman and a young one, he could see the end of the barn where a rough platform had been hastily put together. As a psalm was given out he eagerly scanned the faces before him, then pulling the younger woman's shawl. "Which be Mr Peden?" he asked, with a growing sense of disappointment.

"There, him in the grey plaid," she whispered back, and Walter's heart sank lower. What exactly he had expected it would have been difficult to say; some superman of great height and commanding presence certainly, perhaps, too, his mind's picture had been tintured by the woodcuts of Elijah and Elisha as he had seen them in his mother's Bible. The man before him was unlike these. At first he seemed but an ordinary countryman, neither tall nor commanding though strongly built. His face was thin and weather-beaten, his hair and beard already turning grey; he might have passed unnoticed in any countryside, had indeed so passed these eight years or more. A man with a price upon his head, hunted through the length and the breadth of the West Country, here to-day, to-morrow in some far-off parish of the hills; fleeing from troopers through the bogs of Galloway, covered from their vision by the mists of God. It was only when he raised his eyes and scanned his audience with burning gaze that the flaming prophetic soul of the man illumined his rough and homely exterior. Then he began to speak.

All his life Walter remembered that sermon; passages

from it came back to him in night seasons, some stern and denunciatory, some tender. The voice mellow and slow, pausing in its utterance as if to hearken before it repeated the messages of the Most High, yet urgent and weighty as it called its hearers to lay these things to heart.

“Now, people of God in Scotland, what are ye doing when such dreadful wrath of God is at the door? He is not worth his room in Scotland the day, that prayeth not the half of his time to see if he can prevent the dreadful wrath that is at your door coming upon your poor Motherland. Oh, sirs! Ye must pray, ploughing, harrowing, and shearing, aye, and when ye are eating and drinking and going out and in and at all your employments; there never was more need than now. . . . Where is the Kirk of God in Scotland this day? It is not among the great clergy folk. Sirs, I’ll tell you where the Kirk of God is; wherever there is a praying lad or lass at a dyke-side in Scotland . . . a praying party will go through the storm. . . . Well, then, thou poor body, that will resolve to follow Him, pray fast; if there be but one of you He will be the second. Ye need not fear that ye will want company. Our Lord will be your company Himself, He will condescend as low as you like to you that will resolve to follow Him. But some of you in this countryside, ye ken not these things, the weight of the broken Kirk never troubles you; the loss of a cow, or two or three of your beasts on an ill market day, goes nearer to your hearts. Take heed, sirs, do not mock God. . . . The note I would have you take with you is this: If ye have gotten good of Jesus Christ ye would go through hell at the nearest to be at Him. Oh, sirs, those who have suffered for Christ in Scotland they ken this best the day. They got a stormy sea indeed, but a choice pleasant shore and the Captain of their Salvation to welcome them home. . . . God is travelling up and down the shires of Scotland, saying to this man and that woman: ‘Go, seal My truth with thy blood.’ He hath taken a few out of the shires of Carrick or

Galloway, aye, out of Clydesdale, too, to a scaffold to witness for Him already. I pray you, if He come to seek a testimony from any of you, deny Him not."

The preaching had just ended, when, in the pause which preceded the prayer, a sound clear and distinct came through the night, the thrice-repeated hoot of an owl. Then as eyes rose and faces whitened in the dim light, a head was thrust in at the opened door and a voice called a warning. "There is a party of soldiers marching through Rutherglen, ye'll have half an hour maybe before they are here, time enough if ye go quickly and quietly. We have your horse at the door, Mr Peden, sir."

The minister nodded; then before anyone could stir he lifted his hand and his face as he raised it was alight. "Lord," he prayed, and though his words were homely and familiar, the thrill of his voice held the people quiet even in the face of their terror. "Lord, cast the lap of Thy cloak about Thy children that Thine enemies triumph not over them. Lead Thy servants in straight paths, but let the ways of their enemies be crooked this night, send them about other business, O Lord, that they give no heed to these poor folk here that have come out but to seek Thy face." Then with a last admonition to his hearers to 'Lippen fast to the Grace and Providence of the Most High,' he bade them depart in peace.

It was noted with awe by many as they hurried upon their various roads that a mist had come up from the river and hung thickly over the lowlands towards the township of Rutherglen.

Alas! This very mist, so excellent a shield for the pious country-folk who knew every step of their homeward way, proved a snare and stumbling-block to the unregenerate youth who had come among them from mere profane desire for adventure. Adventure! How glorious a word as his imagination had painted it in the safety of his own chamber. Now, separated from Hamilton in the crowded barn and strung to a high pitch of nervous excitement by the preacher's words, he found the thing less alluring. The prospect

of capture terrified him and his one idea was to reach the boat; he could not see the others of his party and feared they had deserted him, not noticing in his haste that he had taken a wrong turning and was heading away from the direction in which he had come.

As he stumbled along through the damp mists, the preacher's words came back to Walter. "God is travelling up and down the shires saying to this man and to that woman, 'Go, seal My truth with thy blood.'"

"Oh, God," the boy prayed, horrorstruck, "do not call me yet—not just yet, O Lord." He had no heart for martyrdom. He was assailed, too, by a growing fear that he was no better than the enemy, seeing that his paths were by no means being made straight; he had realised for some time that he was lost but he dared not shout lest he should attract his pursuers instead of his friends.

Then out of the darkness came the sounds of horses' feet and champing bits. For a moment Walter stood petrified, he had been walking away from the river then, advancing to meet his foes instead of flying from them? The next instant he turned and fled.

"Hi there!" called a voice, and a horseman spurred after him; but now the mist had become kindly, the horse stumbled on the uneven causeway and the rider pulled it up with an oath. Some one fired a random shot and was cursed in turn by the commander, and Walter as he turned once more, jumped the rough dyke and rolled over into the ditch beyond, heard the soldiers ride past him on their way.

The ditch was muddy and very cold but it brought him to himself. His present escape, too, gave him some confidence; it might be the Lord intended to help him after all? He scrambled cautiously back on to the roadway and began to retrace his steps, but slowly, keeping well behind the sound of the horses. Suddenly he stopped; the mists were lifting and away before him he could see a light, a beacon as it were, cheering him onward, and with a renewal of hope he reflected that it was probably at the Brig-

head and if he could reach that he might still win across unobserved.

His adventures, however, were not yet ended. Hurry as best he could, it seemed a long while ere he saw the church tower of Gorbals and knew himself near the bridge. Twice he tripped and fell over deep ruts in the road, and the second time he must have twisted his ankle for after that each step was pain. He was half afraid he had missed his way again, when a figure rose from a pile of stones by the roadside and caught him by the cloak, and a voice besought him to "Stay a while, sir, pray you stay a while, the night is cold and there be still some hours before dawn. Look you, the House of Hollytrees by the Leper's Lane be a plaguey sweet house and close by."

Through the boy's dazed mind ran warning tales of houses beyond the river where men had been enticed and murdered and no one the wiser ; he tried to shake the woman off, but her arm was about his neck, her evil whispers in his ear. Thoroughly frightened he struck out blindly ; his clenched fist caught her on the face and she dropped from him with a sob. He had started to run but the sound stopped him, it was so hopeless, so pitiful. Hesitating, he turned back irresolute.

"I did not mean to hurt you," he said, wondering if he had misjudged his own strength.

"I hae been out all night and I'll be beaten sore if I take no one home."

Looking down at her in the faint light, he saw she was but a girl, no older than himself, if as old.

"I'll give you money," he muttered, shamefaced ; but she answered him at once, "Ye've got none."

"Losh ! neither I have," said Walter aghast. He remembered he had taken none. This last misfortune overwhelmed him, how was he to cross the bridge without a bawbee for the toll ? The pain in his foot was growing unbearable ; with a groan he sank on to the stones, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears. The girl looked at him, half-amused, half-scornful. Then, with a sort of rough tenderness,

"You are just a bairn," she exclaimed and crept nearer to him. "What's wrong with you? What are you doing here at all?"

"I think I—I've broken my ankle," sobbed Walter in despair. The girl moved quickly; with fingers that were not unskilful she felt the swelling foot, then turning up her ragged skirt, tore a strip from a yet more ragged petticoat and bound the injured ankle.

"Where do you come from? What are you doing?" she asked again, and he told her without reserve. "The preaching? Are you one of those—religious folk?" she asked with an oath that sounded all the uglier on such young lips.

"Whist, lassie!" he said, horrified. "Are ye no feart to say things like yon? There's awful wrath coming upon Scotland because of the like of us, and you are worse than me, I'm thinking, though maybe that is just because you have not had so good a chance, so it'll be me will be most in need of forgiveness. Are you not feared of Hell?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "I have ower muckle to fear before I get there," she said with a bitterness beyond her years. That brought him back sharply to the present.

"They will call the roll in College by five o'clock. If I cannot win in before that I know not what I shall do." Fear of exposure and of his mother's grief vied with the pain of his foot to make him utterly dejected. His mother and Ann, both masterful, had left him with little need for initiative and the crisis found him unprepared. If only he had had money for the bridge. The thought recalled the girl's words. "How did you know I had no money?" he asked suddenly. She laughed a trifle shamefacedly. "You are an innocent! I felt your pockets, of course; look you, there is a boat just down by here, can you row?"

"I dare say I could," he said doubtfully, still aghast at this latest avowal of her guiltiness.

"Come along then; can you walk?" The lad's weakness brought out such strength as she had. "I

will get the boat down for you and take an oar and maybe if I get you back to the College in time you will throw me out some money, so I will not be murdered for going back empty-handed. Whist ! ” She caught his arm, pulling him down behind the stones ; steps were to be heard coming along the road, halting steps and a tapping stick. A low, fierce whisper hissed out a name, “ Grizzie, Grizzie ” ; a string of oaths followed.

The girl dragged her companion after her down the bank towards the river, stooping low. “ She is lame and deaf but she can see in the dark, the old witch ; she will kill us if she finds us now. Come on.” She caught his arm over her shoulder, supporting him, for to use his foot was agony.

“ Who is she ? ” he sobbed out between pain and terror, hobbling along beside her as quick as might be.

“ I do not know. The man who first stole me, sold me to her ; she is a witch, a devil. Come on.”

The woman had caught sight of them and was upon their track ; in spite of her lameness she moved with extraordinary rapidity.

“ She can fly on that stick, but the water will stop her.” The girl, more frightened now than he, tugged at the rope and let the boat free ; together they pushed her down to the water and with a last shove scrambled in, as the current caught and swept her into midstream.

“ He is rich ; I will bring you back money,” the girl screamed over her shoulders, as for a moment they sat hand in hand watching the dim figure on the bank brandishing its stick and cursing them. They were breathless and thankful for their escape. Then Walter cried out, the dim terror of the unknown fading before the grim reality of the known—the boat was without oars.

CHAPTER VI

MR GILBERT BURNET laid down his pen and looked across from the manuscript upon which he had been engaged to where Walter Kennedy lay asleep. Gilbert

was sorely perplexed about the boy. It was now more than a week since, on his not answering to his name at roll call, Kennedy's room had been searched and found empty; later the same day the College authorities had been informed that one of their students had been picked up in an oarless boat with a vagrant girl for company. As the boat appeared to have been stolen, and the pair could, or would, give no proper account of themselves, they had been clapped into the common jail; but the town having been worsted a few months before in an argument as to the University's right to try her own students, it had not dared to keep the boy without informing the Senatus. Mr Burnet, learning that the culprit was none other than his youngest pupil, Walter Kennedy, had persuaded the Rector not only to insist upon the rights of the University but to allow him to resume his guardianship, on the condition that the boy should, when called upon, be duly handed over for trial. Pain, terror, and exposure had done their work on Walter's frail constitution and for some days he had hung between life and death in high fever. Now, however, the fever was gone, and though he was still weak, it was evident he would soon be strong enough to face the consequences of his escapade, whatever these might be. To break College was bad enough, but it was this business of the girl which puzzled Gilbert. Was it possible that Walter, carefully and piously nurtured and having had the benefit of his own watchful instruction, had all the while been leading a life of vice? It seemed unthinkable. Mr Burnet looked again at the sleeping boy, who lay with one hand thrown out as if in protest, the long eyelashes curling back from his cheek, his delicate colouring and air of fragility giving him an appearance of youth and innocence even greater than his age warranted. Was this childlike mask a mask indeed? Gilbert could not believe it. Walter had been naughty but not vicious; nevertheless, unless the Senatus could be persuaded to look leniently upon his offence, punishment would follow and, the

tutor groaned in spirit, there would be the boy's mother to face.

Lady Kennedy was one of those people whom those about them instinctively shield, and Gilbert did not relish having to break to her that her only son and the apple of her eye had disgraced himself while under his own vigilant care. It was with relief, therefore, that he rose to answer a knock which at that moment broke into his reflections. Robert Hamilton stood without. "How is Sir Walter Kennedy, sir?" the young man asked.

Burnet reassured him and added in a sudden burst of confidence. "This is a strange business, Robert; I do not know what to believe. The boat belongs to the Gorbals side it seems, yet no one knows how the boy got there. I cannot think the lad is really vicious."

"No, no, sir; I'll warrant he is not that, though light-minded and careless maybe. Would I be of any assistance to you if I sat with him a while?" He made the offer with some hesitation but Mr Burnet accepted it with delight. He was most anxious to borrow a book from a fellow professor and would be glad to leave his charge in good hands.

"If he wakes maybe he will confide in you, for to me it is, to say truth, a mysterious affair," he said and did not notice the relief lightening for a moment Robert Hamilton's dark face. Left alone the young man waited until the professor's footsteps had died away, then crossing swiftly to the bedside he shook the sleeping boy, whispering his name.

Walter awoke with a start and a cry of fear, then recognising Hamilton, "Oh, Robert, why did you go away and leave me? I was nearly caught by the soldiers; you should not have left me."

"I did not leave you; 'twas you ran from us. We waited as long as we dared. What have you told them? I hope you have not breathed a word of the preaching."

"I have not told anything," Walter said proudly, though the tears were not far away. "You need not look so glum at me, Robert, I am not going to clype."

Then the tears spilled over in self pity as he added, "But they think awful things about me."

"Well, it seems you have been foolish," his friend said gloomily. "It should be a lesson to you not to go gallivanting with lassies; but mind, not a word about the preaching."

That turned Walter's thoughts to the girl. "I wish I knew what had happened to Grizzie," he said with a sob. "Yon was an awfu place they put us in, full of wicked swearing folk, like Hell might be."

"If she is the baggage they say she is better she taste Hell now than burn eternally," Hamilton said sternly. But Walter protested.

"Oh, Rob, she is not very bad, poor lassie, only she has lived with a dreadful woman who is a witch. She took the boat to help me, we never meant to steal it. Rob, couldn't I just tell Gib about the preaching, he would not tell anyone else? I don't like Gib thinking ill of me." But Hamilton was adamant. "You might get a wheen folk into trouble," he said; then relenting a little added, "But I do not think Mr Burnet really believes very ill of you."

"Well, will you try to find out about Grizzie?" pleaded Walter, and Hamilton said he would try and bade the boy go to sleep again; an order impossible to obey.

It was a fortnight later that the judgment was given. Mr Burnet had questioned Walter closely, but could get nothing more from him than that he had but gone for amusement and meant no harm. As to the girl, he had met her by chance and seeing he had no money to cross the bridge she had offered to help him to row; they had meant to return the boat; there was no thought to steal it. "And how, seeing you had no money, did you cross the river in the first instance?" Gilbert had asked. "By boat," the boy had answered, caught unawares; but, glad he could continue with truth he had stoutly affirmed on further question that he knew not whose boat, and Gilbert, seeing he was shielding some one, had left it at that. Later he had gone to Mr Leighton, who, having been himself

sent down from Edinburgh for writing verses on the Provost's nose, was inclined to look leniently on youthful offences, had promised to speak for the boy to the Rector. So that in the end Walter got off lightly, with a sentence of suspension for two months.

The almost more serious problem of his mother's feelings was settled, not without much misgiving on Mr Burnet's part, by telling her only of Walter's illness; and as the doctor had in reality advised his not being sent to the sharper air of the capital, her consent was asked to his going straight to Pulquhanity where, under the care of his foster-mother, the steward's wife, he would, it was hoped, soon regain strength. Mr Burnet proposed to ride down from time to time himself and so keep an eye on his erstwhile pupil's education. Lady Kennedy, always anxious about her son's health, had concurred readily, but Burnet's conscience was not eased until he had written a full account of the affair, as far as he knew it, to Ann. It is possible that had the professor known more his conscience would not even then have been at ease, for before he left Glasgow Walter, who, like many timid and apparently docile people, had a way of getting what he wanted, had communicated with Grizzie. The girl had been whipped and sent to the House of Correction; but this at least kept her out of the witch-woman's clutches and Hamilton, whose conscience was perhaps troubling him a little, had promised to do his best through his sister to have her looked after and to convey to her the money which Walter had sent.

As to that young man himself, the feeling that he was in some measure a martyr had taken the sting from his disgrace, and it was with no little pleasure that in the early days of April he saw once more the blue hills of his beloved Galloway and knew himself free from the trammels of school.

The house of Pulquhanity stands at the head of a wooded valley about six miles from the New Town. A low rambling building, little more than a farmhouse, it had remained in Lady Kennedy's possession

when Batherston had passed into other hands during the late Sir Walter's exile. His widow had never troubled to claim back her husband's estates ; indeed, she preferred to live in Edinburgh and came less and less even to Pulquhanity ; but to her son every stone of it was dear.

At first, while his foot still pained him and remorse filled him with good intentions, Walter had stuck manfully to the study prescribed for him by Mr Burnet, nor heeded the first flush of green spreading over the trees as Spring danced up the valley. His foster-mother would have kept him thus under her eye for ever, pampering him with good things and making believe that he was still the baby she adored ; but though he was willing enough to accept her petting, his year at College had had its effect, and he was no longer a child. As his foot became daily stronger, the burn that ran so invitingly through the glen called him, and the salmon rod that Dalgleish the steward had got for him cried out to be used. There was a small volume of poetry, too, which he had found in an old book-shop the day before his adventure and which he was longing to peruse, so that Mr Burnet's course of study was more and more often laid aside.

Thus it came about that one day towards the beginning of May, while the fleecy clouds moved swiftly before a light breeze and the long shadows chased each other over the hills, Walter rode out with his rod and net strapped to his saddle, a manchet of bread and some home-made cheese in one pocket, and Spenser's "*Faerie Queene*" in the other. He whistled as he rode and it is to be feared, that could the Senatus have seen him, it might have doubted the efficacy of its sentence as a punitive measure.

He was bound for a pool in the Blackwater dear to his heart and famous for its salmon. Behind him lay the Ken valley with Cairnsmore guardian at its head, but the track led up into the hill country where to his right the Rhinns rose shadowy and mysterious, full of secret places in which the hunted might lie

secure. The Prophet Peden had wandered among them, and at that thought Walter stopped his whistling and rode on silently. From the preaching his thoughts wandered to Grizzie. Never in his carefully guarded life had Walter met anyone like Grizzie. What a queer lassie she was and what an awful life she had led with that fearsome witch-woman. She was fair heathen too, knowing neither the Carritch nor the Lord's Prayer, though she had been quick to learn the latter, and had repeated it with him when they found the boat had no oars; only she had boggled over 'As we forgive them,' she did not forgive the old woman she said, and he had affirmed that that did not matter as she was a witch; now he wondered if he was right about that, there was something anent it in the Bible, he thought, but he could not remember where.

He was under the lee of the Black Craig now, on the old battlefield where Bruce had fought for Scotland's freedom. That was what the hillmen were doing now, Hamilton said; fighting for freedom and King Jesus. The great stones lying all about over the bogland looked like dead bodies; the boy shivered a little and spurred on his pony. Suddenly he drew up short. He could see the Blackwater dark and gurgling between its many islets, but he was no longer alone; on the bank by his own particular pool a man was already fishing.

As Walter stopped, half-amazed, half-annoyed, to find himself forestalled, the stranger's line swept out in a beautiful cast; the boy saw the fly drop neatly and disappear as an unwary fish rose to it, the line tightened, and the play began. Whirr! Out it ran, some twenty yards and stopped; the fish was sulking under a stone. Walter, fascinated, forgot his annoyance. He noticed something unusual about the fisherman, and creeping nearer saw that he wore a stout leather strap across his shoulder steadying the rod, the butt of which rested in a second strap or belt about his waist, leaving his left hand comparatively free to reel while, for some reasons not yet clear to

Walter, the other hand remained hidden in the pocket of his coat. The fish had begun to move again; back it came with a rush that left little time to reel in and then as suddenly it was off once more, so that Walter held his breath, fearing him lost; but he was firmly hooked by then, and with patient skill the angler brought him back. A second and third rush followed and again the fish sulked and was persuaded from his lair.

"Davie, get the landing net ready," the fisher called over his shoulder, as at last his victim showed signs of fatigue. As he spoke he lifted his right arm, using it as an extra lever for the steadying of his rod, and with a shock Walter realised the reason for the straps; but the knowledge brought even greater admiration.

Nobody had answered the call. Turning, the boy fled to his pony, got his own net, and was back as, yet again the angler brought his prize nearer and more near.

"I will land him for you," Walter panted, scrambling down into the water. The other threw a quick glance at him and nodded. He was too busy to do more, for the fish though visibly weakening was still active.

"Thank ye, we have him, I think, if he does not bolt again. Now!" And as the great fish leapt and splashed in a last effort for freedom Walter, knee-deep, had him in the net and in the next moment he was panting upon the bank, a fine salmon.

"Sixteen?" the fisherman enquired quizzically, as he laid down his rod and held him up.

"Twenty," Walter answered with enthusiasm.

The other laughed. "You are a true fisherman, young sir, but I doubt me twelve is nearer his measuring weight. I am obliged to you," he added, regarding the lad with an amused stare. "I do not know what has happened to my man, he is either in a day dream or asleep, unless the fairies have got him. Anyway, without you I would have lost this fellow, and he is a beauty." Then, as his quick look round

for David showed him the pony and accoutrements, "You are a fisherman yourself, I perceive; there is plenty of room for a second rod just up yonder," and he indicated a higher pool.

Walter, who would have resented this from anyone else on what he had quite unreasonably regarded as his own preserve, thanked him gratefully and went for his rod.

For the next hour they fished in silence but caught nothing further; the day had brightened considerably and the fish had ceased to move.

"What say you to breakfast?" Kelston asked, laying aside his rod. "Davie got some trout earlier which will make good eating and there is a pasty, and a bottle of wine cooling behind that stone. You will honour me, sir? But where the devil is David?" He put two fingers in his mouth and sent forth a long piercing whistle; then, as there was still no sign of the truant, he proceeded with Walter's help to make a fire and clean and cook his trout, as nearly as possible, as he explained to the admiring youth, after the manner prescribed by that great and complete angler, Mr Walton.

"Are you a soldier, sir?" The boy, himself a dreamer, was astounded at the skill of his one-handed companion.

"I? No, though I have seen fighting; at Dunkirk it was, when I was about your age, I dare say."

"Dunkirk? I have heard my mother talk of that. My father was a soldier; he fought with the Duke of York at Cambrai when I was a baby, but he was ill and unable to follow his Grace to Dunkirk."

"Eh, well! He lost little honour by that, I'se warrant you, for we were very thoroughly beaten."

"That was the fault of the Spaniards, cowardly dogs," cried the boy hotly; but Kelston, always fair-minded, shook his head.

"No, they are not that, though badly generalised they certainly were and too proud to take a warning. I saw a fine thing done that day when Henry, the Duke of Gloucester, had his sword struck from his

hand. The equerry of the Prince de Ligny sprang down and recovered it, while the Duke guarded him with his pistol. We were in a tight corner just then, if De Ligny had not come to our rescue."

"Was it then——" began Walter and stopped, blushing and confused; but Kelston answered without embarrassment; he had schooled himself to face the question which he knew must come.

"No, that was later, in France, an accident." Then looking round as footsteps were heard hurrying towards them, "Ah, here is the truant at last."

Walter, too, looked up. He expected to see a shame-faced servant full of apologies, but there was nothing shamefaced about David Gourlay as he stalked up to them. "The fish ready cooked? The Lord's goodness is wonderful." He bent over and took the plate, "Asking your pardon, I'll need this," he said.

"Have ye gone doited, Gourlay?" Kelston asked, for accustomed though he was to David's vagaries this was beyond everything. But David answered with grave dignity.

"Nay, sir, you know well I would not ask it but for necessity; you will not grudge it to a starving man, but ask no questions, for conscience' sake."

"It is for the hill men," Walter broke in excitedly, and blushed again as Gourlay with a startled exclamation, gazed fixedly at him.

"I did not see that there was anyone with you," the man muttered; then the alarm in his blue eyes changed and a strange expression took its place. "You are sure a Douglas, laddie?"

"No, I'm a Kennedy, Kennedy of Pulquhanity," the boy answered with a shy pride.

"The same thing, you are her son," said Davie softly. 'Hazels of Kells burn, we are pursued by 'em,' thought his master with inward amusement as he, too, looked with new interest at the yellow-green eyes with their long lashes, turned questioningly from David's face to his.

"My mother is an Episcopalian, but I would not betray a hill man," Walter said, misunderstanding

their looks. Then, desirous to prove his sincerity, added quickly, "I have been to a field preaching myself not very long since; 'twas for that I was sent down from college." Nor did he notice that his statement was not entire truth.

"'Deed were ye now?" said David, and looked at him as he had looked at Ann on that June night nearly a year before. Then he remembered his errand and his face changed again. "I am wasting time and there is little time to waste. Hill man or no, he is a dying one, so you'll please to let me take what ye are no needing, and the less ye know the less ye'll have to deny if ever questions be asked."

"Oh, do let me go too," cried Walter, and looked at Kelston.

"God forbid," said Davie hastily; but Kelston was tired of fishing and inclined to mischief.

"Why, that is only fair," said he; "if you take our breakfast, you must e'en let us come and see what rapscallion rebels are to eat it."

"He is no rebel, but an old man that ye have seen before. But you are daft, Kells," David added, lowering his voice; "you do not know what you are doing."

"That is our safety then, for seeing we be strangers who know not the laws we cannot be blamed for breaking 'em. If your man is dying, Davie, the wine (there is half a bottle left) will be more use than the pasty."

"And the pony might be useful," added Walter.

David gave in. He knew Kells of old, and if he delayed now he feared they would find but a corpse, so with a shrug he set about hastily collecting the remains of the food, while Kelston laid the rods carefully aside and Walter ran to fetch the pony; then without further protest he set off for the hills, Kelston and Walter at his heels. Presently coming to a mass of rugged stone he paused, bidding Walter tether the pony where it would be hidden from anyone who might be about for they could take it no farther. Then telling them to mind well their footsteps, he turned off across what at first seemed an impassable bog, but over which David

evidently knew a path. Once Walter stepped wide and sank to his knees but managed to jerk himself back before the others noticed, after which he was very careful indeed. Across the bog, David paused again and gave a low whistle. From above them to the left the signal was answered, and in a moment more they were standing on a sheltered platform, so well hidden that the uninitiated might have passed it a hundred times and never known of its existence.

"You need na' fear; they are friends," David said, and crossed to where a man lay with closed eyes, his head supported by a gaunt youth who sat crouched and inert beside him.

"I care not if they be friend or foe, for he is past their care or hurt," the youth replied listlessly. For a moment Walter, looking at the emaciated figure on the ground, thought he spoke truth and that life had indeed already sped. But Kelston had crossed to David's side. "Moisten his lips," he said, and poured a little of the wine into a horn cup the servant held out to him; "he is not dead yet." Then turning to the youth he offered him the flagon. "Take a dram yourself and eat," he commanded; and sitting down he slipped an arm under the sick man's head and very gently moved it to his own knee, while David brought all his arts to bear on his restoration.

The wine brought a touch of colour to the young man's cheek, and he seized eagerly on the food Walter spread before him; but before it was at his mouth he laid it down again with a hoarse, "God forgive me," and removing his bonnet prayed long and earnestly for a blessing. Then, "Keep the best for him," he said, and Walter intimating that they had done so, he fell to ravenously.

"How long have you been here without food?" Walter asked, watching him, for the others were busy with the sick man.

"Here? In this place we have been three days. I was trying to get him down to the house of—of a good man he wot of who would have sheltered him, but he could go no farther. We have had nothing

but water and a pickle meal for near a week, and yestreen the meal ran out. Who is he ? ” he whispered, with a jerk of his head towards Kelston.

“ I do not know,” Walter whispered back, “ but he will not give you up, I am sure of that.”

“ I do not care,” the young man repeated, “ so they can save him. For myself I’d almost as lief be in prison as here ; it is awful up there among the hills.” He looked round him, shivering.

“ But prison is dreadful too, I have been there,” Walter said, and added with a touch of swagger, “ maybe you have never been in prison ? ” The youth drew down his ragged stocking and showed a red festering scar on his bony ankle. “ Aye have I, six weeks in irons and fed on bread and water.”

“ Losh ! ” said Walter, his windbag burst, “ what had you done ? ”

“ What indeed,” the other answered bitterly, “ what but hearing the Word of God preached faithfully by this godly man i’ the fields, and then refusing to betray my honest neighbours to the wrath of the persecutors.” The food and wine had revived the young man ; his eyes burned with the remembrance of his wrongs and his voice shook with emotion as he related them.

Walter, deeply interested and painfully conscious that he had but barely escaped a like fate, was yet faintly sceptical that this alone could have merited so severe a punishment. “ You’ll have been known to be a Presbyterian, I suppose ? ” he asked doubtfully.

“ I was not ; my family all conformed and I with them. I went first to hear the preaching that I might scoff at it ; but the Lord in His mercy looked upon my woeful state and turned me, through the preaching of this faithful man, so that I saw my sin ere it was too late. Never again, do with me what they will, will I attend the unlawful ministry of the curates ; nay, not even of those Erastians, the ‘ King’s Curates,’ who have dragged their honourable calling through the mud of the Indulgence.”

“ Seems we attend a field preaching now, whether we will or no.” Kelston’s voice, cool and slightly scorn-

ful, cut across the young man's impassioned eloquence. "Unless you would summon the Dragoons from the New Town, young man, you had best moderate your speech."

"And pass me back that flagon," David added; "he is coming to." It was true the old man had opened his eyes, looking about him questioningly. Kells raised him a little and David held the cup to his lips, and when he had drunk they dipped a little bread into the wine and this too he managed to swallow. Once more his eyes passed from face to face, and rising to Kelston's upon whose shoulder he leaned, recognition dawned in them, a smile crept over his wan features, and his lips parted :

" 'A certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was, and when he saw him he had compassion on him.' " The faint voice sank and the eyes closed again wearily as his head fell back.

CHAPTER VII

THE wind had risen towards evening, bringing rain in sharp, blustering showers ; April weather at its fiercest, continuing, as it is apt to do in these parts, far beyond its own name month.

Around Kells Tower it soughed and moaned noisily, and far below on the high road the curate, riding to St John's Town as fast as his short-legged pony would carry him, cursed in his native tongue and wondered if he dared venture the ford ; more than half wishing he had foregone revenge for this night at least, and had stayed at his fireside. But then the news his spy had brought in from the hills would be worth a lot to Captain De Morgan (that was why he had chosen to carry it to him rather than to Mr Telfer at the New Town) and worth the price of one, if not two—no, he feared not two—bottles of usquebaugh to the curate himself, though Captain De Morgan could not be called generous.

In the yard at Kells William's dog howled once as

the moon showed itself for a moment ; but in the dais chamber a deep peace reigned, while a life slowly ebbed away.

Exposure and deprivation had done their work on one who had always been frail and was now no longer young. Eppie and David had striven hard to save him, but from the first they guessed their task hopeless. Now the old minister lay propped about with pillows on the state bed of the man whose path had twice already so strangely touched his ; beside him sat Mr John Cant, the indulged minister of Kells, sent for by his special request.

Presently the old man opened his eyes and began to speak. " I have thought and maybe spoken hard things of you, John." His voice was very feeble and his breath at times laboured, but his face was peaceful and he did not appear to suffer. " I ask your pardon now, for though I cannot say yet I believe you right still I am sure I did wrong to judge you."

The other bowed his head, laying his hand over the transparent one upon the bed.

" Ah ! Robert, if there be aught for me to pardon I do it gladly, and would ask your pardon in return for any act of mine which has made your lot more hard. You will believe me, that such was never my will or intention. My flock cried for meat ; it seemed to me (indeed I believed I had the Lord's will upon it) that to refuse the chance the Indulgence offered to return and feed them were nothing less than pride and vain glory in suffering. Maybe I was wrong in thus choosing the easier way, yet the Lord knoweth I sought not my own safety but rather His glory, and the opening of a larger door of liberty to his distracted Church. If so be, as many say, our compliance hath but added to the sufferings of those who saw not the way to such acceptance, then indeed is our distress sore."

The older man shook his head feebly. " Nay, then, be not troubled for that. Surely it hath only taught us further of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, for whom I have suffered the loss of all

things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found of Him."

His eyes closed again and for a few moments he seemed asleep. Then, "I would speak with my good Samaritan," he whispered, with the ghost of his old humorous smile.

Simon stood by the fire looking down at it, but he turned as Mr Cant repeated the message and came to the bedside.

"I knew your good-sire, we were lads together." Simon nodded, waiting. "You have served Cæsar, they tell me? Served ye him faithfully?"

"I have so endeavoured," Simon answered, humouring him.

The old man smiled. "That is well," he said. "Now see ye that when the Lord calls for His dues also ye are not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Then his face clouded. "I remember the King when he came first to Scotland; he would have ruled without the Covenant; but finding that might not be he complied sinfully, for his heart was not with us. Yet I do confess that our pressing him to it seems now, to my apprehension, a greater sin than his signing it. May God forgive us and him." Again his voice trailed away into silence. Mr Cant, kneeling by the bed, began to pray, asking that this passing soul might be given evidence of the pardon of his sins and of his eternal interest in his all-sufficient Redeemer, and that as 'the outward man decayeth, he may behold death without fear.' For the last time the dying man opened his eyes, but this time he looked neither at Kelston nor at his friend; instead, his gaze went beyond them, fixing itself as it were on some unseen presence. A smile of strange, unearthly beauty illumined his worn face, and raising himself from his pillows he sat erect, his hands turned outward, as in a welcoming gesture.

"And the Lamb was the light thereof."

Kelston never felt certain who had spoken the words, so clear and sweet they sounded through the quiet room.

He put his hand over his eyes, finding himself deeply moved, as with hardly a sigh the spirit passed upon its way, and Mr Cant laid his friend's lifeless body back upon the pillows and gently closed the sightless eyes.

As he did so the wind, swirling round the tower, carried a new sound to their ears—the jingle of a horse's bit and the clang of iron shoes upon the stones. Mr Cant raised his head, his face strained and anxious; then as he looked again at the calm majesty of death his lips moved in a fervent, "Thank God, they came no sooner." At the same moment David opened the door. "The Dragoons," he said, and he, too, looked at the dead man with relief.

Kelston had always been inclined to laugh at David's terrors anent the soldiers; but even he, as a peremptory knock sounded through the house, was bound to admit that, with a personal enemy in command, a good deal of unpleasantness might ensue from a visit of soldiers at this moment; and that it was not young Telfer who thus loudly sought admission he was pretty certain.

William's face at the foot of the stairs looked white in the candlelight, and Mr Cant, though no coward, was obviously troubled. Only Euphan as she stepped across the threshold, a fresh linen gown upon her arm, appeared unmoved.

"Dragoons or no, if you will leave me, sirs, I will e'en prepare this good man for his burial."

"God grant they will leave his body in your care," said the minister in a low voice. Kells looked at him quickly, then turning he left them and went down to William in the hall as a second knock battered upon the door. He stopped at the stair foot, edging his sword nearer to his hand as he bade William ask what was wanted. The servant undid the porter's window and a hoarse voice bade them open in the King's name. Will turned for orders. Kelston nodded; there was, he thought, no need to arouse suspicion if by any chance they did not know of his late visitor.

"What? Captain De Morgan once more desirous of

accepting our hospitality ? ” he asked as De Morgan strode up into the hall. He was followed by a sergeant and two troopers while a third blocked the doorway. Taking no notice of the jibe De Morgan pointed to William and gave a sharp order. “ Secure the man ; we want no warning given to the traitor,” and before Will could move, two troopers had seized him.

“ Have ye a warrant for the apprehension of my servant ? ” Kelston asked, holding in his anger.

“ Warrant enough, and that is my word to my men,” swaggered De Morgan and came nearer. He knew now from Telfer why Kelston’s hand had not been removed from his pocket at their last meeting, and the knowledge gave him a sense of triumph.

“ Your—word ? ” The question in the tone was more telling than any comment ; the sergeant grinned behind his hand. De Morgan flushed darkly.

“ Look you, Kelston,” he said, but with less bluster ; “ I do not want to interfere with you, but you must give up the rebel preacher who is hidden in your house.”

“ Mr Cant is indulged and is no rebel.”

“ Damn Mr Cant. Do not sham ignorance. The old man Weston is in this house, and you know it.”

“ There is not a living soul in this house save Mr Cant and my servants.”

“ Escaped ? I do not believe it. At any rate we will soon see about that. Stand aside, Kelston. I do not wish to hurt—a cripple.” De Morgan’s eyelid seemed to droop with a more than usually unpleasant leer, but Simon only smiled.

“ My dear Captain, I should not have dreamt of using my right hand again in dealing with you, so do not let my loss distress you.” And as De Morgan moved forward as if to push him aside his long sword flashed out, making the ex-guardsman leap back, almost on the top of the sergeant.

“ I will have your house searched in spite of you,” he shouted, recovering.

“ By all means, when you have produced your

warrant." Kelston, who was by now pretty sure that De Morgan had no warrant, was beginning to enjoy himself.

"Arrest him, sergeant." The sergeant moved cautiously forward. The tall man standing so confidently above him was no mean antagonist, for all his one-handedness.

De Morgan saw the man's hesitation and took a swift resolve. He hated Kelston as only one who has been shamed can hate him who shamed him; the fellow had resisted, and that should cover him if, later, questions came to be asked. Stepping back he caught a pistol from the nearest trooper and, closing up, took slow, deliberate aim.

William, who had stood passively enough between his guards, flung himself forward with a cry of horror, only to be seized and held more securely. He heard his master's quick laugh, followed by a scream; saw De Morgan stagger, the pistol going off harmlessly as it fell with a clatter to the floor, its owner's first finger neatly severed above the joint still clutched in the trigger. Then the room was full of smoke and Kelston back on his coign of vantage before any had thought to intercept him.

"I regret it, Captain; but you should not stoop to murder. This is the second time I have saved your soul for you."

De Morgan, cursing and moaning, stood holding his wounded hand. The sergeant had run to him, for the spurting blood made the injury seem even greater than it was; the others still stood uncertain, the more so that behind his master had appeared the broad, stooped figure of David, a grim apparition as he stood leaning on an ancient axe amidst the curling smoke.

Suddenly into this scene of confusion burst a person of extraordinary appearance, a tall man, from under whose old-fashioned beaver white locks hung, while a beard of enormous dimensions flowed over his breast to the girdle of his tightly buttoned coat. In spite of rain and wind he wore neither cloak nor outer

garment. He was followed by three or four more troopers, dare-devil, hardened-looking fellows. Pausing a moment, he surveyed the scene, then perceiving that it was his own officer who was wounded he burst into a torrent of oaths, varying in dialect but doubtless not in ferocity.

"Resistance? The—Whigs dare to resist? Cut down the bloody rebels." His own sword was out and the troopers at his back hastened to obey; but with a swift turn of his wrist Simon had dropped his sword, caught it by the tip, and presented its hilt to the infuriated old man.

"Oddsfish, General, I yield me prisoner. You come only just in time to the rescue of your little one."

"Rescue? S'blood, I will rescue you, hang you up by the heels, roast the resistance out of you, you damned——. St Andrew of all the Russias, if it is not Simon Kelston! What the devil are you doing playing practical jokes in this God-forsaken country, you young imp of Satan?" And pushing the sword hilt aside, to the astonishment of all the onlookers General Dalyell seized Simon in his arms and kissed him resoundingly upon both cheeks.

It had been noon the following day before the old General had departed, taking his bodyguard with him. When he had gone Simon sat for a time, his head on his hand, a tankard of ale at his elbow. It was, he explained to David, long since he had lied so imaginatively or drunk so deep—he was out of practice in both; and for once David had forbore to reprove his master's flippancy, being like the rest of the household only too thankful to see Dalyell's back.

Simon's explanation to the General had been simple—Fishing on the Blackwater he had wandered farther than usual into the hills and having found an old man overcome by illness, had brought him home. "I know nothing of your outlaw ministers but common charity forbade leaving a fellow-creature to die like a sheep on the hillside."

The story had been devoid of offence, as told by John Kelston's 'little boy'; the more so as a brief account of his former relations with De Morgan had made clear that gentleman's personal enmity.

De Morgan had received short shrift from his superior therefore, and had been ordered back to his quarters with curses where he had hoped for reward; the triumph had seemed once more with Kelston. The evening had, however, not been without anxiety, an anxiety which had become most acute when Dalyell, smoothing his long beard and stretching his feet to the blazing logs, had stopped for a moment in his flow of genial reminiscences to exclaim; "Well, well, lad, the old scoundrel Weston is dead, so we need trouble no more as to where he died; but to-morrow we'll e'en hang his stark body at the cross roads as a warning to others." He beamed at Simon over his glass, so much the picture of benevolent old age that, for a moment, his host wondered if he had heard aright, or if some grim jest only was intended; but a cruel glitter in the steely eyes undeceived him. Simon rose slowly, leaning his hand on the table as he met the other's eyes squarely.

"Sir, this was my father's house; this man, whatever he had done, had been a guest within it; for my father's sake you will not put this shame upon me?"

"S'blood, Sim, the fellow was a traitor!"

"Bah! What had he done? Refused to bow to Sharp and his crew? You and I know well enough the King's own opinion of his Grace of St Andrews."

The old General hesitated, glaring at the young man from beneath beetling brows; but Simon stood his ground smiling, though his heart thumped uncomfortably in his side.

"Tush! General, do not spoil good wine with this talk of gibbets," said he, and pushed the flagon across the table.

In the end Dalyell gave way; after all the dead man, though he had been a damned Presbyterian Whig, had been also a Weston of Kirkinluck and cousin-

german to the Earl of Craigentinny. Only, Kells must see to it that he was put away secretly. "If I find the countryside making a martyr of him I'll come and howk up his body for the daws to peck at; mind you that, young man."

No, the evening had not been altogether a success, though Dalyell, congratulating his host on his wine and enjoying its fragrance, did not perhaps notice Simon's wandering thoughts. What astounded Kelston as he looked back upon the scene in the hall was not so much his escape from a dangerous situation as how nearly he had failed to escape. Had he been other than himself, the son of Dalyell's old friend and fellow-soldier, it was certain that the fierce old man would have cut him down first and enquired later—if, indeed, he stopped to inquire at all into the justice of his attack. That his victim had been in arms against the King's troops would have been enough. Or, had he escaped the swords of Dalyell's ruffians, he might even now be lying in some borough jail, awaiting trial as harbourer of the King's enemies. The thing was laughable but behind the laughter was an odd sense of discomfort; the reminder that the old security was gone, and his life shaken to its foundation.

There arose, too, the question; had he been so accused would the King have put out a hand to save him? He told himself angrily that the doubt was unjust to Charles, yet never in those long weary months of exile had the King troubled to send him a word of greeting.

Dalyell in his gossip had given him the key to this callousness. Charles had, it seemed, taken 'Madame Carwell,' as she was coming to be called, Maid of Honour to the late Princess Henrietta, into the household of his Queen. He was, so the report ran, hot upon her, but she held him at arm's-length, playing with him; though that, said the General, would not last long; it was the merest pertness on the part of this little French doll who undoubtedly meant to be the new Mistress of England.

At another time Simon might have thrown his careless meed of pity to her who was Queen only in name ; but for the moment all other feeling had been swallowed up in sick loathing of the affront which Charles's fickleness put upon the memory of his own beloved lady. As he had listened to Dalyell's gossip he had felt the fingers he no longer possessed twitching in his empty pocket ; but Dalyell, unaware of the storm he had aroused, chatted on in excellent humour. He had accepted Kells's explanation of his own return to Scotland. Lauderdale had warned him, said Simon, that there was trouble in his countryside, and as he was somewhat under a cloud at the Court (" the King is really making a stand against duelling ") he thought he would take the opportunity of seeing for himself how matters stood. Dalyell had scoffed at the idea of Charles's severity and had promised, laughing, to speak for the delinquent, but had been sobered by Simon's half-shamed, half-laughing rejoinder that, having prided himself on his swordsmanship he would as lief not face Court just yet. For the first time Dalyell had really looked at his host and had thereupon cried out with a horror that made his victim wince. " Was this the effect of a duel then ? A damnable business, poor lad, poor lad." And then, remembering the scene in the hall. " Well, it has not knocked the fight out of you altogether, thank God ! " he had said with a chuckle and dropped the subject. Nevertheless Simon had in great measure shared his household's unfeigned relief when the General and his troopers rode off next day.

That night they buried the old minister in Kells kirkyard. Walking back alone from that secret burial Simon found himself comparing those two old men, so unlike in all but that in each had burned strong devotion to a cause. Dalyell stood for the past in his life and the sight of him brought back many pictures. Simon seemed suddenly to see the Park sunlit and gay, Charles with his Court around him good-naturedly cursing the old fellow in his quaint garb for bringing the rabble about their feet to gape

and stare at his long beard and antique habit, and Dalyell, as ready to laugh as any, stopping to thank the boys for their escort.

From somewhere behind Kelston a whaup rose flying over his head with its haunting cry. The sound pierced his consciousness and brought him back to the present. His way lay by a lochan or little mere, now in the last glow of a stormy sunset; the rushes grew from pools of iridescent light; about him the hills were caught up into the soft deep shadows, clothed upon by the purple garments of night; a water hen ruffled herself with a pleasant gurgling amidst the reeds as she settled once more to rest. In the still peace that picture of the noisy sunlit Park seemed garish and unlovely. His old life? Simon stood still, faced by the astonishing discovery that even were his hand restored and his place assured he did not wish to go back. He told himself in swift scorn that this was the sour grapes of the fable; but he knew, even as he said it, that it was not so. That old life had been unsatisfying, all the while it had left him seeking. His thoughts, never long absent from her, turned again to Madame. She, too, had found life empty, had been seeking, half-unconsciously maybe, as he had; what was it she told him that day in the garden had driven her to Bossuet's preaching? 'Not fear of death, not even fear of life, but a great emptiness here about my heart.' Had she found that for which she sought? Had her hungry heart been filled? Madame Desbourdes said it had. Feuillet had had no doubt of it.

In the Bastille, in the first fevered horror of his mutilation when the agony in his arm had kept him sleepless and at times light-headed, Simon had begged to see the Jansenist Canon of St Cloud, and to his surprise some days later his request had been granted. It had been a strange interview. The Jansenist, stern and unbending, had bidden him, in much the same terms as Euphan had since used, thank God that his hand and not his soul had paid for his presumption; but later he had spoken of Madame, touched perhaps,

for all his sternness, by the hunger in the prisoner's worn face ; moved, too, to enthusiasm, almost against his will, over the patience and exquisite resignation of that young Princess, for whom life seemed to hold so much and earth be filled with promise, and who, when called with such tragic suddenness to leave all, had yet spoken in a language so unlike the world to which she belonged. "God gave her sentiments that surprised me," he owned, and at that Simon had cried out: "She was of high heart, a Princess; did you expect her to whine?" and then more bitterly, "Did He give her nothing more satisfying than sentiments?" And to this Feuillet had answered with grave simplicity, "He gave her Christ."

Christ? Simon, still standing, his eyes on the golden streak of sunset, his thoughts far off, repeated the name questioningly as if he heard it now for the first time. "Christ?" He had learnt about Christ in the Catechism, had addressed to Him daily the prayers David had taught him to repeat as a child, but he had never thought of Him in this way. Certain it was not the Christ of his knowledge, 'executing His office of a prophet, a priest, a king,' who could have filled his lady's empty heart. Almost it seemed to him now that the Christ whose name he had heard in many a strange oath on the lips of men dying in battle, or in the foul Belgian dens of Charles's frequenting, must be more real than this formal far-off figure of his knowledge—a Christ not far off but present, looking forth at times from William's quiet eyes or visible in Mr Cant's grave beauty. This surely was the Christ of whom Feuillet had spoken, the Christ who only last night had illumined with so strange a glory the death-bed of His aged servitor.

To Simon, to whom religion had been a fact unquestioned but of no great personal interest, there came of a sudden the realisation that this Christ, unlike His formal counterpart, bore in His hand a challenge that could hardly with honour be refused.

The light had left the water and behind the Rhinns the flaming glory had died to one pale line of amber.

Simon moved slowly on, only to stop and swing about with a feeling that he was no longer alone. "Who is there?" he demanded, and peered into the gathering gloom where tree and bush seemed to take curious shape. No one answered, and half-ashamed of what seemed his own imagining he walked on, but this time he was alert. The rain had begun again, the wind made strange crackling among the heather. No, that was neither wind nor rain. Simon's ever ready hand slipped to his hilt. The moon was young, but if she would but show herself for a moment—There! He turned sharply, his sword-point at the throat of a man creeping behind him.

"I am unarmed, so to kill me were murder."

"Who are you? What do you want?" It was too dark to discern more than a black figure crouching away from his point.

"Reuben Halket, sir, the same you found with Mr Weston on the hills."

"What? I thought you knew some godly person would shelter you?"

"He dared not, seeing the soldiers so near. Sir, I pray you, let me sleep in one of your barns to-night."

"Damn you, no; I will have no more rebels in my house."

"Only in a barn for a night," pleaded the youth, "somewhere where I can hear folk moving and maybe get a sight of them through a chink. I dare not go back to these fearsome hills alone."

"Go back to your father's house then."

"I cannot do that; he lives far from here, in Fife. But now the soldiers will not trouble you again so soon. Oh, sir, have pity for one night."

The moon cleared for a moment before disappearing once more among the clouds. In the moment Simon had a glimpse of the white, strained face. The lad was hungry and badly frightened.

"Come on then," said Kells ungraciously, and believed himself a fool.

CHAPTER VIII

THREE days later Simon sat in the parlour smoking and reading. His arm had been unusually fevered and painful and Euphan and David, exercising their authority, had kept him in bed ; but to-day he had broken loose and refused further pampering. A post had come from London and he sat with the letters spread before him on the table. A note from Will Chiffinch anent payment, or rather non-payment, of certain moneys, a short, businesslike epistle, for though Chiffinch and he had always kept on good terms, there had never been much liking between them. Now Will told him plainly, though with due apology for the necessity, that after the enclosed no further payment need be expected of his salary as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber. Simon tossed the letter aside with a shrug. For the money he cared little, but the finality implied so calmly hurt more than he cared to own. Perhaps that was why the second letter brought a lump to his throat, the while its quaint humour made him laugh as he read. It was from Mistress Nell Gwyn ; of all his many friends and acquaintances she, the orange girl of Old Drury and the King's mistress, alone had troubled to discover his address and send him a letter. Simon brushed his hand across his eyes and re-read the letter. It was writ to her dictation of course, Nell had had no schooling, but he could almost hear the tones of her voice as he read. 'Pray, deare Mr Kelston, forgive me for not writing to you before now, for the reason I have bin Sick, and since I am recovered I have nothing to entertain you withal, nor having nothing now worth writing, but that I can hold no longer to let you know I never have bin in any Companie without drinking your Health for I love you hartily. The Pel Mel is now to me a dismal Place though I have moved into a new House there, for the one you wot of was but a Leasehold and I trow I have con-

veyed my Services free enough under the Crown to deserve a Freehold. We are all grown very French here having a new Miss who is of such high station that she must needs wear mourning for all the grand Lords and Ladies of France who happen to Dye being cousin to every one of Rank in that Country. Is she not a Jade? If I had been reered a Grand Ladye I should blush for myself. Why do you not come back? You are needed. I told the King so when we Supped with him at Whitehall last week. I suppose that you know that Her Grace of York is dead, we know not who will succeed her. The face of his Royal Highness is longer than ever but I am going to call my next Son after him. The King says that will cheere him. 'Prince Perkin' and my Lord Albemarle have been in trouble for fighting the guard, and killing a poor Beadle. I have a thousand Merry Conceits but I can't make her write 'em therefore you must take the Will for the Deed. My Son remembers his sarvis to you. Your most loving faithful obedient and humble Sarvint, E. G.'

Kelston put the letter down and sat thinking. So the Duchess of York was dead? Poor soul, and her death had made so little stir that Dalyell had not even thought to tell him of it. He got up and went to the door.

"Eppie," he called. "Euphan!" and when she came,

"Is that fellow still here?"

"Yes, Kells."

"Did you say he could write?"

"He has been to the University of St Andrews."

"And you believe him honest?"

"Aye, he is honest," she said.

"Yet he still refuses to go home?" he asked, frowning and drumming the table with nervous fingers.

"He cannot go home, Kells; his father is a Conformist with no thought but for his pocket."

"Hum! That is his son's account of him, is it? Charming youth! Still, you think I might employ him? Well, if you can clean him and get him a suit

of clothes that suggests not theft from the tattiebogle, I will see him."

"Thank you, sir," said Euphan who seldom wasted words. She did not waste time either, it would appear, or else she had already acted upon his suggestion, for in an incredibly short time she ushered in the young man, shaved and clean and in a suit of clothes which, if somewhat antique in fashion and hanging a trifle loosely on his spare figure, was not unsuitable for an upper servant. Seen thus he was by no means so unprepossessing as he had appeared on the hillside.

"Look you, Reuben Halket," said Simon, coming straightly to the point as Euphan closed the door upon them, "as you have doubtless perceived I have lost my right hand, and although I can make shift to do most things with my left I cannot write. I have need, therefore, of some one silent, honest, and dependable, to do this for me, for my private correspondence that is, for Morrison can do all that is required for the estate. You are not, I think, known here? And as I understand it, you have already suffered for that which brought you within the law and are, therefore, save for your own pigheadedness, quit of it? For your board and lodging, two suits of clothing, and ten pounds a year, I am willing to try your capacity as a secretary. What say you?"

The young man's pale face had flushed. He was still weak from exposure and lack of food, and for a moment Kelston feared he might weep; but he mastered his emotion and answered, not without dignity, "I thank you, sir, for your generosity, which I shall do my utmost to deserve."

Simon nodded; he liked the lad better for making no protestations. Then, remembering his outburst upon the hillside he added, "Hark ye, there is one thing more; I am Presbyterian and so is my household. You are, I take it, the same. We are fortunate in having a Presbyterian minister in this parish. You will, therefore, be able to attend Church with the others."

Again the slow flush rose in the young man's sunken cheeks. "I do not approve the Indulgence," he muttered painfully.

"I do not ask what you approve or disapprove; I state the terms of my service." He watched the lad's struggle with himself, his desire for a decent life, his horror of the hills, fighting against what he supposed to be his principles. Then, as in a kind of blind despair Reuben half-turned to the door, he called him back.

"Do not be a fool, Halket," he said with rough kindness. "I am not asking you to go against your conscience. Mr Cant was minister here before he was turned out. In accepting the Indulgence he was but coming back to what was his by the law of his Church; even your friend, Mr Weston, asked his pardon for misjudging him. I am not going to risk my people's necks for a whim of yours. Come and sit down."

"God forgive me if I sin," said Reuben Halket, and did as he was told.

After all, his duties had to be delayed, for the requisites were not forthcoming; so the letters were put aside until the following day and he himself sent with David to the Borough to procure writing materials and to be measured for a suit of clothes more in keeping with his new employment. The next morning, however, found him installed at the oak table with inkhorn, paper, pens, and sand, while his new master walked about the sunny room and endeavoured to compose his thoughts to some sort of order for dictation. It gave Simon a curious feeling of excitement to be thus once more in possible touch with London. A sailor wrecked upon a desert isle might have felt the same when, after weeks of loneliness, he sighted an approaching sail. First he dictated a short and formal acknowledgment to Mr Chiffinch.

"Now we will write to my good friend, Mr Pin, at the Pillars of Hercules, Strand," said he, "and tell him to send me two new suits of the latest fashion,

one for riding and country wear and the second more elegant, but also of cloth. There is no need, Mr Halket, that one should go shabby for all one lives out of town (and Lord knows if my credit will stand much longer). Tell him also to send me twelve new shirts and to see to it that the sleeves are long and the ruffles at least three inches in depth. I am, mayhap, a trifle thinner, otherwise my old measure should do."

After that he would have Reuben write to his shoemaker and to Chedreux, the wigmaker, for a new periwig. "And we had best get one for you, too; I cannot have you looking as if you had attended the late King's execution," for Reuben's hair was cropped short like any Roundhead's. "Tell him it is for my secretary and the size you take in hats. Best send you a medium brown one, eh?"

"Best wait and see if I suit you, sir," Reuben said with a faint smile; but Simon, liking the smile, was insistent. "Now take your properest pen and paper and write your most elegant hand. 'To His Royal Highness the Duke of York, St James's Palace.'" Reuben gasped but wrote as bidden. "'May it please Your Royal Highness to accept the profound and sincere commiserations of Your Grace's humble servant on the loss you have sustained by the death of the most gracious lady, your late wife.' You know the sort of thing, Halket, short and quite formal; one does not take liberties with James."

Reuben did not know, having never written to Royalty in his life, but he had certainly no desire to take liberties, and after some hesitating and many scratchings out he produced a short and formal epistle which Simon pronounced excellent.

"One more and I have done. Begin, 'My dear, your letter was a blink of sunlight through gray clouds'; No, Nell will not know what blink means. Damn, what's the English of it?"

"Gleam," said Reuben solemnly.

"Gleam? Yes, that will do. Tell her I have not seen a living soul for months nor had news of town

save from old Tom Dalyell who came three days since and tried to spit me for a rebel. That from him also I had word of the—ah, French Invasion, which he liked as much as she did. Tell her—Lord! what can I tell her?” He felt like echoing Nell’s own words with just a change of pronoun, ‘I have a thousand merry conceits, but can’t make *him* write ’em,’ for how, indeed, could he write what he would say to Nelly through the medium of this solemn-faced youth? “What have you written?” he asked.

“My dear Madam, your letter was a gleam of sunshine through the gray clouds of my present existence; I, having seen no person of quality for months, unless General Dalyell can so be counted, who came these three days since and would have brutally murdered me as a rebel had he not happily recognised me in time. Through him also I heard the distressing news of a possible invasion from France which he—I think I must have misunderstood you, sir—you said, but I cannot think you meant ‘he likes as much as she does’?”

Simon put back his head and laughed. “You have misunderstood a good deal, my lad, and Nell would misunderstand more, I fancy. Tear that up now and write this just as I tell you.”

“Your letter, my dear, was worthy of your kind heart, and most welcome. You, I am sure, have no fear, nor need have, of France. No one can take your place, which is indeed ‘freehold,’ like your new house. Of the latter, I wish you much joy and felicitation. If the Duke’s namesake (to whom I wish a happy delivery) be as fine a boy as young Charles, he will doubtless cheer his godfather. Tell the King that old Tom Dalyell was here three days ago and would have shot me on sight for a rebel, but that I cried him mercy; whereupon, he embraced me instead—an almost worse fate. He also told me of Mademoiselle, whom he loves as well as you do. In these parts his be a name by which naughty children are brought to good behaviour, he being more feared than the devil.

"Give his Majesty my love and service, and tell him we of the West Country are not as bad as we are painted by their Graces of St Andrews and Glasgow.

"I cannot come back yet, my dear, for I have lost the art of jig making, but some day when I have recovered it, you will, I hope, dance once more to my music. Till then I pray you cease not to love me, lest 'I die out of my calling in a Tragedy.'"

"There, that will do for to-day," Simon said, stretching his long limbs. He came and stood looking over Reuben's shoulder. "Let me see if I cannot manage a signature. S.K. She will know who that is."

"To whom shall I address this letter?" asked Reuben. Simon told him, 'Mistress Eleanor Gwyn,' and saw him hesitate as if the name recalled something, but he evidently could not quite remember what, and wrote it, therefore, without comment. Simon turned again to the window. The sunlight glinted on the Rhinns and in the pools of a hillside burn. It was too fine a day to linger indoors and he wanted exercise. A sudden thought came to him that he would walk down to Pulquhanity and see if Walter had any news of the Duchess of York's death, which must needs have affected his sister. Reuben was laboriously addressing the last letter, "Pall Mall," said Simon, and added, "Did you ever play the game?"

"No" said Reuben, "but I," he hesitated, "I have played golf," he admitted. He felt all games were unregenerate, but Simon caught him up eagerly. "Golf? My father played golf here at Kells, if I mistake not. Hark ye, Halket, ask Will about it, he will lend you men to get the links right if that be possible and maybe you can teach me. See about it when you have finished that. Summer is coming."

He nodded and strode out, and Reuben saw him a moment later swinging down the track as if he had not a care in the world, whistling as he went,

CHAPTER IX

SIMON walked swiftly along the moorland track, but as he came down beside the murmuring water of Craigshinnie Lane his whistling changed into a soft humming; the water itself seemed to join in that melody. Half unconsciously he began, not for the first time, to fit words of his own to that ancient tune; once again her presence walked beside him, her voice was in the ripple of the water. The way lay through a wooded glade where already the young oaks were golden amidst the feathery greens of the birches, the undergrowth was flowery beneath his feet, and a drowsy stillness hung about the place. His footsteps slackened and he stood still listening, dreaming. This was her land, though she had never set foot in it; hers by the right of her fathers, hers because it was his and because he loved her; hers, too, because of her own love of the beautiful.

“And it is beautiful, here in the woods, and up there where the old track goes on over the moors, and in that great red valley behind the Carnraus through which the Dee flows like a silver ribbon; so much more beautiful than the formal gardens of St Cloud, or that grandiose new palace that Louis is building for himself. How would you climb over those great boulders or walk waist-high among the bracken? You would not have to, my sweet, for I would carry you in my arms. Anne! my little Minette, why did you not let me have my way that day in the garden? I see now that I was right. Up there in the Rhinns they would never have found us, and there is heather for a soft bed, good red venison and trout to eat, and a shelter of bracken among the rocks to keep off wind and rain withal; and then when the summer was over and they had forgotten us, Kells and a fire of peats. Why did you not come? No, no, my Queen, I know you could not. Madame of France and Princess of England, you could not have come to me then. But

now? Now all those trappings are buried in that terrible vault, now you are just your own dear self again, my Anne, now you can come. Where are you, Beloved? In heaven? I can give you golden streets in plenty when the bracken turns in the Autumn. Look above you at the blue through those golden arches, surely here is heaven enough?" He was kneeling now among the flowers, his head thrown back a little as he waited. She was behind him, he could hear the faint sound of her as the withered leaves rustled under her light footsteps. He was so still that a squirrel, bright-eyed and inquisitive, came out on an overhead bough to peep at him, and the mavis gave no heed to his presence as she searched, turning the leaves for her young ones' food.

A light touch, caressing fingers, gentle as a summer breeze, stirred his hair, and with a swift movement Simon threw up his hand to catch them. The action startled the squirrel and the mavis flew off with an indignant chirrup. His arm had dropped on the instant, he uttered a queer choked sound as he pressed it to his side nothing had clasped nothing, all was fantasy and unreal. Away below him the burn whispered anxiously as if it, too, were distressed.

A mile up the glen a boy and girl sat together on a fallen tree.

"You see, Grizzie," the boy was saying, "they know not, nor must know, aught of the preaching, therefore they believe I crossed the river for your sake, ergo it will not do that any see us together, else will they believe——" he paused, hesitating, "believe they thought truly," he ended lamely.

"What did they think?" she mocked, not because she did not know but because a spirit of mischief moved her, and perhaps because she liked to see the pink flush rise in his face.

"They will think I take more interest in you than is seemly, seeing you be but a serving wench at Garryford," he answered with the stolid simplicity that often defeated her.

“ Why then, good sir, do you talk with me at all ? ” she asked pouting. In her neat apron and homespun gown Grizzie looked very different from the tattered lassie of the riverside, though her hair, which had been cut off in the Correction House, was still short as a boy’s, shorter a good deal than Walter’s own. It was queer hair, golden-brown in parts but bleached by sun and weather into many shades. She was very thin, a mere whipping-post of a girl with fear in her eyes; but there was something else in them as well, a curious, indefinable penetration that made folk uncomfortable in her presence yet loth to leave it. She looked sidelong at Walter now through dark lashes that went oddly with her hair.

He wriggled a little, uncomfortable under her mockery, but stood his ground, answering question by question, Scottish fashion. “ Why would I not speak with you; you saved my life? I would never have won across the river but for you, and I am terribly sorry for the trouble I got you into; I wish I could have taken that whipping for you.”

She shrugged her thin shoulders. “ You got me out of that Correction House any gait,” she said. “ God! Yon was a bad place.” She moved a trifle nearer to him and spoke in a faintly wheedling tone, “ I do not know if I can bide in this place very long, they are for ever preaching at me and praying over me and watching to see I do not steal, and I must be in before sundown. It is almost like prison, save that there is always more food than I can eat. I will maybe have to run for it some day;” she ended with a laugh, but Walter was aghast.

“ Where would you go, Grizzie ? ”

“ The deil knows,” she said. Then the frightened look came back to her eyes; she put out a timid hand and touched him. “ I do not want to go,” she whispered, “ not really, but I think sometimes yon woman has got a spell on me.”

“ Oh, Grizzie ! ” he began, more than ever horrified, but she jumped to her feet. “ Hush! There is some one coming, you had best go; besides, if Mysie

Tamson finds I am not in the byre, she'll up and tell at the house."

"It's not *Her*, is it?" Walter whispered, sick with fright, but the girl shook her head. "No, it's a man," she said, and at the moment Kelston came slowly out of the wood.

His eyes were on the ground, but he lifted them as the girl came towards him, swinging her empty milking pail. There were two ways here and he was uncertain which to take, and waiting for her, he had a glimpse of the boy as he slipped away; but at the moment he was not thinking of either of them. The girl appraised him with a swift glance; he was not the sort of fine gentleman who came to the House of Hollytrees by the Lepers' Lane, though there had been plenty who thought themselves fine enough. This one was different; she felt instinctively that he would not have come there, though he was no young innocent like Walter nor yet a psalm-singing Whig like the farmer at Garryford; his eyes had pain behind them when he first looked up. Grizzie curtsied, suddenly shy and speechless.

"Am I on the right road for Pulquhanity?" She nodded. Then as he would have passed on with a word of thanks, "There is a nearer way by the wood yonder, but I am not very sure of it, I—I'm a stranger here, too." He looked at her now, really seeing her for the first time, a farm wench but different from most. In a town street he might have guessed her kind, yet she was not quite that either. "A stranger? Where is your home then?" he asked idly and with a vague feeling that he might have seen the girl somewhere before. He was not prepared for the mingled shame and fear that leapt in her eyes as she dropped them, answering half-sulkily and with lowered head, "I have no home."

'A waif? poor little devil,' he thought, and his hand slipped into his pocket; but he did not give her the intended coin for her head came up again quickly, as if she had read his thought. "I am in good service here, I thank you, sir."

The child had pride, it seemed ; he smiled at her good-naturedly. "That is well and no doubt you will get a home for yourself ere long, my dear." He nodded to her, touched his hat brim courteously, and went on his way, forgetting her before he was round the next corner, though he owned she was attractive.

Grizzie stood looking after him. "I suppose I was a fool," she thought as she watched his tall figure swing out of sight. "But no, I did not want money, not from him."

Kelston, asking for Sir Walter Kennedy, was shown into a sunlit parlour where a long window stood open and steps led down to the garden.

"He went up the wood half an hour since to see if the lintie in the thorn-tree has hatched her eggs out yet ; he should be back by now," Kelston heard a voice he knew saying, and Ann came up the steps and into the parlour. She wore a large hat and a sprigged gown, and her arms were full of daffodils.

"I am so sorry, sir," she said as she stepped into the room. "My brother seems to be lost ; but he cannot be far, if you will be so good as to wait." The sunlight was still in her eyes and she did not recognise him.

"Why, certainly, Cousin Ann," said he, and hearing his voice she dropped her flowers with a little cry of "Simon !" and came to him with outstretched hands.

"I thought you were in London, my dear ; this is an unexpected pleasure," he said, and caught one of the little hands in his long, brown fingers as he stooped to kiss her upturned cheek.

"And I thought you were—oh, I did not know what to think," she admitted with a laugh that was half a sob, as she led him across to the settle. "Have you really been here all the time, Simon ? I was afraid—oh, I was so afraid." She looked at him shyly ; he was different, she thought, older and more stern. He had forgotten his periwig and she noted with a stab of pain that at his temples the black hair was already touched with grey, and he was not yet

thirty. She noted, too, the use of his left hand and cried out again in sudden alarm, "Simon, you have hurt your hand?"

He flushed under his tan and for a moment his eyes wavered, then he steadied and met her frightened look with a smile.

"No, my dear, I have not, well, not exactly hurt it, only I—played the fool a little, gambled with it, so to speak, and lost it."

"Lost it? You mean—oh, you can't mean you have lost your hand? Simon, your bowing hand?"

He winced at that and the smile froze, for that was the loss of all others he tried hardest to forget.

Ann had slipped to her knees, her hand still on his arm. "Oh, my dear, my dear, forgive me, I have hurt you with my careless tongue," and the tears brimmed over. He had thought she too looked older, less a child than she had been; but certain, she looked very young now, with all the unselfconsciousness of a child, as she knelt before him, wide-eyed and distressed.

"You certainly got under my guard," he admitted with a rueful laugh as he raised her gently, "but I broke my bow and left my fiddle in France, it was finished with anyway. Let us talk of other things. How is it you come to be here? Ah, yes, the poor Duchess?"

She nodded and, struggling with her pain so that she might not further distress him, began to talk quietly of the Duchess's death. "It was very pitiful, she suffered so greatly both in body and mind and no one seemed to care, no one but dear Margaret Blagge, who nursed her and did all she could to give her comfort. The rest; oh, it was awful; they had started before she died to argue about her successor. They said the Duke was ill too; I hope he was, for he certainly came little to see his wife. Yet they said it was to please him she turned—did you know she had turned Papist?"

"Yes, she told me because she would have me carry word of it to Madame. Do not look so shocked, little Ann; I think she was sincere, poor soul."

"Maybe; I do not know, but she was not happy. 'What is truth?' she asked the Bishop, and 'truth, truth,' she kept muttering in her pain, poor soul indeed. Oh, I am glad to be away from them all," she cried passionately.

"But are you not going back?" It occurred to him that if she were not it would be pleasant to have the child for a neighbour.

"No, the Queen was kind; she offered to take me into her household but——" she stopped and in her transparent face he read the question of how much he knew.

"Louise de Kéroualle? You never could abide her!"

"Oh," she cried, startled, "you know?" Then as he nodded without speaking, "the King should not have done that, it is dishonouring to her memory." Her anger pleased him though instinctively he defended Charles.

"I suspect her coming was the arrangement of King Louis; policy rather than love." In spite of his effort the bitterness showed in his voice, and again she sought to carry his thoughts from what could not but hurt him.

"Let us go into the garden. I cannot think what has happened to Walter," and recollecting suddenly the reason for his visit, "it was Walter you came to see? How strange that he never told me he knew you?" She stopped a moment on her way to the window and there was a little frown between her eyes. "Walter has changed," she went on slowly. "I am glad you know him for you can advise me."

"Our acquaintance is not yet very intimate," Kelston said, amused at her motherly attitude. "We fished together and had an adventure which probably is the reason of his silence, for David I fancy bound him to secrecy. David loves a mystery. Besides, I doubt if he even knows my name."

"He has been sent down from college. My mother does not know, but Mr Burnet, his tutor, wrote to me. That was another reason why I was glad to come

home ; Walter is so young, so very young for his age, and he used to be timid. Oh, I do hope you do not think I am a tale-tit ? it is just that you always understood, Cousin Simon."

"You need have no distress in telling me," he answered her. "Walter himself told me, with no questioning on my part, that he had been sent down. Something anent attending a preaching, was it not ?"

"A preaching ?" And as a light broke on her bewilderment, "Why, that would account for it ; but why should he make such a mystery of it to Gilbert and even to me, and then tell you like that without your even asking ?"

Sitting under a white-flowered gean-tree she told him of Walter's escapade. A 'girl in a boat,' thought Simon, with sudden remembrance of the boy and girl in the wood. Seems Master Walter has a pretty taste in wenches ; but of this he said no word to the anxious little sister beside him. Instead, he told her of the adventure in the hills. "David was right and I was wrong ; I should not have taken him with us," he admitted, "for there was danger, and that is probably why he could tell nothing in college. I think, to us, it slipped out unthinking and to convince us he was no spy. Best keep the knowledge to yourself, the boy was maybe right about that ; and here he comes."

It was late afternoon before Simon returned to Kells House. Brother and sister had besought him to stay to dinner ; and indeed, he had needed little pressing, for the prospect of his own solitary meal held no allurements for a man who, for the moment at least, was half-afraid of his own thoughts.

To Ann it had been a day of days, wiping out the terror and anxiety of those last hateful months when contradictory rumours had only helped to confirm her own dread imaginings. For Ann had been present one August day at Hampton Court when Rochester, urged by Cuthbert Moule, had asked the King what had become of his 'Shadow,' and had been answered with just that shade of hauteur which forbade further

question, that 'Mr Kelston was in Scotland.' Something in Charles's dark face, a fleeting anxiety, a terror instantly repressed, had confirmed her own worst dread. Simon was not in Scotland; he had gone to France, as he had threatened. What was he doing? What had become of him? No wonder that now as she looked across the table at him, laughing and jesting with Walter, even the tragedy of his lost hand could not dim her thankfulness. Indeed, there was an added pride in the skill which made his loss so little noticeable, and the open admiration which Walter accorded to her hero was a grateful cordial to a heart hardly able to believe its own release from fear. There had been no more time for private talk between them, but when Walter went to fetch the key of the yard from which they could most easily reach the upper woodland path Ann drew from her gown a small silk bag and, unfastening it hurriedly, held out to him a packet. "It is your miniature, I have worn it always lest harm came to it." He took it without speaking, and as his fingers closed tightly over it she noted with a quick pang of sympathy that his lips were not quite steady. Then with a murmured word of thanks he thrust it into an inner pocket as Walter's whistling sounded up the path, leaving them no time for further speech.

Euphan was crossing the yard from the milk house when Simon came through the gate; he stopped, waiting for her, and linked an arm in hers. Something in his face made her look at him quickly. "I met an old friend to-day," he said.

"Deed, so I was thinking."

"Tuts, woman, and I always believed myself a secret sort of fellow." She smiled at that and shook her head, as still holding her by the arm he walked with her to the door of the kitchen.

"You? you are just a bairn whiles, Kells, wi' no thought to your ain dignity. Do ye know that your wig has been sitting all day cockit up on the head of yon plaister stookie your goodsire brought from Italy? Soretie, or some such name, he called him.

And what will the maids think if they see you wi' your arm through mine as if I was still your nannie ? ”

“ Do you care what they think ? ” he asked ; and then more seriously. “ Young Sir Walter Kennedy and his sister are at Pulquhanity. I dined with them to-day. Can I ask them here to dine, or is it not convenient—What's the Scots for that ? ”

“ I'm no conversant wi' foreign tongues,” said Eppie with dry humour, “ but I'll make bold to think the good Scots for it is just that ye ought to have a lady at the head of yer table, Kells. Are the bairns here their lanesels or is her ladyship with them ? ”

“ Alone. My lady is not in good health, it seems.” He had shrugged away her translation good-humouredly. “ Did you know Lady Kennedy when she came about here in my father's time ? ”

“ Aye, I knew her.” Euphan's face had resumed its habitual grim expression. “ She was aye a good deal taken up about her health and her looks and the like.”

“ Was my father fond of her ? ” he asked suddenly, and at that she shot him a quick look and finding his eyes on her, dropped her own.

“ Maybe he was, as a lad ; but her father was never a covenanted man. He left the country rather than sign.”

“ Which was honest of him anyway,” said Kelston, amused at her disapproving tone. “ I like that spirit, whichever side it is on.” He hoped to draw her, but she had said all she intended.

“ I canna stand here ony longer claverin, asking your pardon,” was all the answer she gave him, but added, “ the more so that the minister was here half the morning catechising the household, and all the work at a standstill.” And seeing the astonishment in his face, “ it is the time of the yearly sacrament drawing nigh and it behoved he should know the state of his flock. I am no saying aught against it, but just it's time I was getting on now.”

Halket, his new master having given him no orders save these about the imaginary golf links, was endeavouring to earn his wages by cataloguing the books in the parlour. Kelston found him there, seated upon

the top of a ladder, a volume of Knox's Chronicle of Scotland on his knee.

"Well, Halket, did you see the minister?" Kelston asked, rescuing his periwig from the head of the unfortunate Socrates. "I trust he has settled your difficulties for good and all."

"I will not go so far as to say that, sir," Halket answered, balancing the book carefully upon his knees and regarding Simon solemnly from over its edge. "I think, however, that, on the whole, he made the position of the King's curates, nay, the Indulged, I should say," he corrected himself, noting his master's frown, "clearer to me than hitherto; and while refusing to admit that King or Parliament have any authority in the spiritual matter of holding or binding the preachers, I admit that, in Mr Cant's case, it would have come near spiritual pride had he refused to return to his pastoral duties merely because permission came through unwarranted channels."

"Well, my lad," said Simon, regarding the youth on the ladder with some amazement, "you have a wonderful gift of tongue—not to say the devil's own assurance," he added under his breath. "If Mr Cant listened to all that with patience seems he has as much right to saintship as had Job!"

"I do think me he is a learned and pious gentleman," said the grave youth on the ladder, and wondered why his master laughed.

Alone in his chamber Simon took out the packet, carefully undid its fastening, and after a moment's hesitation opened the case. There before him smiled the sweet baby face, the blue laughing eyes that even in these childish days had had power to enchain his heart. As in the wood that very morning, it seemed impossible to believe her gone from him, she was his as she had never been in life; and yet, with these painted eyes smiling up at him, overwhelming him in a flood of memory, he was, for the first time in his life, acutely conscious of his own loneliness. He was twenty-eight, young still; was his life lived already? Was the rest to be but shadowless existence, a shade

among shades ? Had he ever lived at all ? Was the past but one long dreaming ? He got up restlessly and began to pace up and down. Euphan's words came back to him. 'A lady at the head of his table.' Was that the answer to his restlessness ? To marry would be no disloyalty to his Princess, no mere wife could take her place in his heart ; and it would be on the other hand loyal to his ancestors ; he was the last of his house and their name must die with him unless he changed his manner of living and begot children. The thought of old Simon brought him to a standstill with a smile twisting his long mouth. Like David Gourlay, Simon the first had had a quaint method of solving his problems, and upon his grandson came a freakish spirit of emulation. On the chest, beneath the old man's portrait, lay his Bible. Simon flung it open with careless hand and let his eyes drop on the page. As he read the message thus revealed his expression changed slowly. Incredulity, surprise, and a half-puzzled amusement chased each other across his mobile features. Then, closing the Book, he looked at the portrait above him ; his face wore that impish look that Charles had always recognised as the forerunner of mischief, and removing his hat he bowed ceremoniously to the portrait. "Eh bien, Kells, as to the Kingdom of Heaven I cannot say, but it is clear I can do no more for you." Then flinging his hat on to the chest beside his wig he went back to the miniature, and this time his eyes smiled back at hers without bitterness. "A eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake ?" he repeated under his breath. "So be it, my little Queen in Heaven ; on the whole I think, in the meantime at least, we will abide by the suggestion."

CHAPTER X

THE links at Kells prospered. Simon sent to Andrew Dickson at Leith for clubs and balls, and set himself assiduously to learn their use. It was not easy with

his one hand, but Dickson on Reuben's suggestion had made a special left-handed club, and though Reuben could still beat his master without much difficulty, Simon could in turn soon beat Walter, and with Ann as his partner could put up an excellent game against the other two. Neither Ann nor Walter had played before, and Reuben privately disapproved of Ann's learning, the more so that she showed a truly unladylike aptitude for the game; but her kindness and sunny good humour soon disarmed the austere youth, and, after all, her adroitness did credit to his tuition which her brother's efforts did not. Walter's time of suspension was over, but smallpox raged in Glasgow that summer and Mr Burnet, who came down with the news, thought it unsafe for him to return.

To Mr Burnet, troubled about his pupil's studies, Simon made a suggestion; why should not Halket help Sir Walter? Halket was a graduate of St Andrews and not unlearned and his duties at Kells left him time to spare. Mr Burnet would have preferred an Episcopalian but approved Reuben's gravity and, that young man for once circumspectly avoiding controversy, the matter was settled. For Ann the days slipped past on dancing toes, and after these months of almost monastic retreat Simon found the company of the two young people much to his taste. Even Reuben in this atmosphere of youth and laughter developed unexpected traits of dry humour, and succumbed to bouts of worldly indulgence such as this too evident enjoyment of golf; an enjoyment which, to do Reuben justice, he wrestled with earnestly in private but which his master encouraged whole-heartedly as an antidote to what he considered his secretary's lugubrious religiosity, even when some three weeks later the real depth of Reuben's unregeneracy was revealed.

Simon had been supping at Pulquhanity and was walking home in the twilight. He had just turned the corner of his house, meaning to enter by the turret door, when he came upon Euphan, her hand

pressed to her side as she stood in a listening attitude, looking up at a window in the tower. So intent was she that she did not notice his coming; then, as he was about to address some teasing remark to her, there floated out from the high window the notes of a violin played softly, hesitatingly, as if the player were dreaming his tune as he played it. And the tune was Sandy's; the plaintive air that had stirred the mourners at St Denis and ended with the breaking of a bow. "God," said Simon and gripped Euphan's shoulder. She turned and looked at him. "That's Sandy's fiddle," she said in an awed whisper. "Aye, and Sandy's tune, there is none here dare play it."

But after the first momentary surprise Simon had recovered. "Maybe, but that is Halket's window; well, that young fellow is full of surprises." He spoke coolly; but for all that the fingers on Euphan's shoulder had left their mark, so convulsively had they gripped her.

"Where did *he* learn it?" she asked still half-incredulous, but Simon laughed. "Seems he is doing that now," he said, as once again the notes faltered out on the evening breeze.

"It's Sandy's fiddle," she said obstinately and there were tears in her eyes as she turned away and entered the house. Simon followed her slowly but he did not stop, as she did, at the foot of the stair. He went on until he came to the door on the floor above his own. So strongly built was the old tower that he heard no sound of music until he was outside the room, and then but faintly. He knocked, opened the door, and went in.

On the window seat, his leg tucked beneath him, his cheek resting lovingly on the fiddle, sat Reuben. He had ceased to play Sandy's tune and was pouring out his soul in sweet Highland melody, forgetful of everything. Simon, leaning against the door-post, listened appreciatively and more than half-enviously; he would have given a good deal to be able to take the violin from the lad and, in turn, say upon it the

thoughts that rose tumultuously within him. The draught from the open door blew some papers from the table and roused Reuben; he looked up, caught sight of Simon, and sprang to his feet, flushed and distressed.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir."

"What for?" asked Simon. He crossed to the window and took up the violin, examining it carefully. "Where did you get this?" he asked presently, as Reuben stood shamefacedly eyeing him.

"In the attic, when I was looking for the old clubs Mistress Morrison said were there; it is a homely instrument but the tone is good."

"Yes, it belonged to a lad who used to live here. Where did you learn that tune? No, not the one you were playing when I came in, the other"—he began to finger the strings with his left hand, holding the violin as if he would play it.

"Sir, you also play? ah, but of course I forgot," he broke off, stammering.

"Used to," said Simon with a shrug, and repeated his question. "You go wrong in the third line," he added, "it goes thus."

"Yes, I remember now. I knew there was something wrong. It was the gypsy girl at Garryford, I heard her sing it. She is a strange girl; it is a strange tune."

"It is," said Simon, and said no more.

He sat for a time where Reuben had been sitting, looking out over the moors to where far off he could catch a glimpse of the loch gleaming white in the evening light. His thoughts had gone straying, and Reuben, watching him with anxious eyes, was surprised at the sudden tenderness in his master's face. Then Simon rose, laying down the fiddle and assuming once more his usual nonchalant manner.

"Well, now we have a fiddler we must e'en have a dance when Lady Kennedy comes next week," he said lightly. But this was too much for his secretary.

"Sir, I would do aught to please you, aught in reason, but to play dance music—nay! I pray you,

sir, ask not this. I was wrong enough maybe to play thus lightly as I was doing; but to play for that sinful and profane amusement, the more so, when the whole land groaneth by reason of God's just punishment for her manifold sins; indeed, indeed, sir, I may not do that." He wrung his hands, looking at his master with such genuine distress that, in spite of the annoyance Simon felt at the fellow's fanaticism, he must needs soothe him with a good-natured, "Well, well, an' you think it a sin, I suppose 'tis sin to you, so we'll say no more on't, though for my part I cannot see how the country is harmed by such an innocent diversion, any more than by your playing. But play not that particular tune, if you please; it has sad memories in this house." And a trifle more grimly he added, "The lad who played it last in these parts was hanged out yonder."

Lady Kennedy, Walter told Simon, had unexpectedly decided to join her children at Pulquhanity and Ann had gone to Edinburgh to escort her. Ann, Simon had long ago discovered, was the man of her family. He would give her ladyship time to recover from her journey, he decided, and then go down to pay his respects; he was not without a lazy curiosity as to this lady of the hazels.

When the day came he did not go through the wood, but rode down in state, clad in the new suit of ash-coloured cloth and embroidered taffeta waistcoat that Mr Pin had sent from London, and with David riding ceremoniously behind him.

It was a bright morning in early June and the hawthorn was full of blossom, so white in places that it almost seemed as if snow lay on the hedgerows. Walter met Mr Kelston at the door and led him to the garden where his mother lay on a long couch that had been placed for her in the shelter of the orchard wall.

"You must forgive an invalid, sir. I would fain rise to receive you but my tyrannical daughter has given me stern orders to be still." She smiled at him as, his hat beneath his arm, he kissed the hand that she held out to him. Yes, she had eyes like the hazel

buds, shaded by lashes that curled like Walter's, giving her a look of youth. She was prettier than Ann would ever be, had indeed been something of a beauty. It was difficult to believe her the mother of the two young people who waited upon her with such anxious solicitude. It was only on closer examination that signs of ill-health and certain peevish lines about her mouth qualified the first impressions.

"I knew your father, sir, and I am glad to have this opportunity of meeting his son." She had the manner of a princess receiving some ambassador. Simon, always receptive to atmosphere, fell in with her mood.

"My father never forgot the days when your ladyship honoured him with your acquaintance."

A dimple showed at the corner of her mouth. "You must have been somewhat young when your father confided his memories to you," she quizzed him; but for all that he could see she was not ill-pleased.

"My lady, I judge by my own eyes and his known good sense," he answered with his disarming smile, and at that she laughed outright.

"You are not like your father in appearance but I see you have something of his ready tongue; in looks you are your goodsire over again. I trust, however, you differ from him in politics," she added, with once more that little assumption of royalty.

"If by politics your ladyship means Church polity," he answered dryly, "I am a Presbyterian, as were both he and my father; but I trust that, like them, I am loyal."

"Ah, yes, your father died nobly," she said with a pretty drop in her voice, "and you have the great privilege of serving the King. I have to thank you, too, for your kindness to my foolish little daughter whilst she was at Court. The lamented death of her Grace of York has made a sad change in Ann's prospects." She sighed and went on to tell him of her own early friendship with the parents of the late Duchess.

Walter, who had heard this story many times, slipped off to look at his ferrets, and after a few

minutes Lady Kennedy sent Ann on an errand to the house. When they were alone she turned impulsively towards him, laying her fragile hand on his arm. "Mr Kelston, we are strangers yet we are related, and I have heard so much of you from my children I feel I may trust you? I am a widow and have no man to advise me and I am greatly perplexed—do I impose upon your good nature?" and at his hasty denial she went on. "You knew Ann in London; she is young for her age, very inexperienced, but she can be stubborn too." She paused, and then went on more quickly. "I have just had for Ann a most excellent offer of marriage; it was indeed to inform her of this that I hurried to Pulquhanity earlier than is my custom. Her suitor is a near neighbour of mine in Edinburgh, the Earl of Glenample, a nobleman of good family and considerable wealth, which latter, in view of the very small dowry that, owing to her father's loyalty I can give to Ann, is in itself a matter of some importance. She has so determinedly refused to return to Court, and that in spite of her Majesty's most considerate offer, that I naturally supposed she would be delighted with the prospect of so honourable and propitious a settlement. Picture then my displeasure when, instead, she cries out foolishly that she never intends to marry and begs me with tears not to pursue the subject! Could you believe that any young lady in her senses could behave in so ridiculous a manner?"

"Mistress Ann is very young," stammered Simon, taken aback by this unexpected revelation; but Lady Kennedy caught him up sharply. "Young? She is seventeen. I was a mother at her age."

"But Glenample is more than twice her age." He felt an unaccountable aversion to the thought of my Lord Glenample, whom he remembered to have seen in some of the wildest orgies of Whitehall, as the husband of his little cousin.

"Nonsense," said her ladyship, who did not like opposition. "Lord Glenample cannot be much over thirty—old to Ann, I admit; but if other conditions

are suitable, as in this case, I do not think that need be a barrier ; in fact, for a child like Ann, I consider it a distinct advantage. He is a handsome man and, though a widower, has no surviving children. I fear I trouble you with my private anxieties, Mr Kelston ? ” (for indeed he looked a trifle gloomy). “ Yet you are, as I have said, as near a relative as I possess and I am greatly upset. I do not wish to press Ann unduly, but I am in poor health and the idea of leaving her unprotected is very distressing to me.” She paused to let this plea have full weight, and as he still hesitated, “ You speak disparagingly of Lord Glenample’s age ; is it possible that there is some one in London ? The child is very reserved. There was one, a Sir Cuthbert Moule, whom she mentioned at times in her letters, and who is, I understand, a young man of wealth and family ? I have no desire to press Ann into a marriage with Glenample if there is already some suitable match to which her heart would more readily consent, but in my precarious state of health— ” she stopped again with a little eloquent gesture, and as he still sat silent, made her final appeal. “ Your father and I were good friends, he was indeed at one time my very dear servant ; I cannot help turning now to his son in my anxiety. Ann has, I believe, a great respect and liking for you. Will you use your influence with her as might a guardian or elder brother ? Walter is so very young.”

Riding home between the banks of white chervil and the snow-clad hawthorns Simon found himself in no very pleasant humour. He had refused to stay to dinner, pleading an engagement with a tenant, though, in truth, it was rather a desire to avoid Ann. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he had failed the child, seeing that under the appeal of those long-lashed eyes of her mother he had in some measure committed himself to encourage her daughter’s nuptial sacrifice. Not that he had any desire to act as guardian or elder brother to Mistress Kennedy ; and certain, the more he thought of it, the less he liked the idea of wedding her to that devil-may-care old roué, Lord

Glenample. Thirty? Nonsense, the fellow was fifty if he were a day and boasted of having as many mistresses as the King himself.

Simon's horse here broke rudely into his meditation by rearing and nearly unseating him. "What the devil?"—

A girl whose sudden appearance had so startled the animal was standing very quiet among the chervil; but as the horse plunged again she leaned forward and deftly caught the frightened creature by the bridle and with a word stilled him. Then with one hand on the horse's bridle and the other softly caressing his neck, she looked up at his rider.

"The devil!" said Simon again, and looked down at her, too astounded to say more.

"I am sorry I frightened your horse, but see, I have stilled him again. I did not mean to startle you." The animal snuggled his nose into her breast and she took her hand from his bridle and stroked his ears, all the while regarding his rider with grave, brooding eyes.

"I desire to ask a favour of you, sir."

"The devil you do," said Simon monotonously. He was still too astonished to vary his expressions as he looked down at the golden-brown hair and strange pale face of his petitioner.

"I should be greatly indebted if you would speak a word to Mistress Kennedy——"

"Good heavens!" snapped Simon unguardedly, "how many requests am I to proffer to that unfortunate child?" Then as Grizzie's face showed faint surprise, "Well, what do you want from her?" he asked hurriedly.

"Only that she take me into her service. The maid she brought from London left her, unable to bear the country. I would serve her very faithfully and I am not unskilful with my fingers." She held out for Simon's inspection her long, thin, capable hands, but he did not glance at them.

"And why should you come to me with such a request?" he asked.

The slow flush mounted in Grizzie's white face but her strange eyes did not waver, though she hesitated a little in her speech. "I—I think the young lady would listen to you, she has—she—I thought perhaps, if you would be so kind." Suddenly her eyes dropped. "I would take great care of her," she muttered.

"Suppose you ask Sir Walter to give you a character, my dear; I fancy he knows more of you than I do," Simon said grimly. He thought the girl no better than she should be and was in no humour just then to be played upon; but her grave acceptance of his sneer staggered him.

"I thank you, sir," said Grizzie, "I will do as you suggest." And she raised her eyes again with limpid, innocent gaze, dropped a well-mannered curtsy, and stood aside to let him pass. Then he remembered. "Look you," he said, bending a little towards her, "there is a tune you sing in the woods, I am told, a gypsy tune, have you words for it?"

She shook her head. "Only my own."

"Who taught it to you?" he asked again.

"A gypsy;" she made answer. "I lived a while with gypsies, they stole me from my home. The gypsy's words were bawdy, I would not sing them; but the tune—the tune is of sadness and of love. Shall I sing it to you?"

"God forbid," he said shortly and then, half-ashamed of his roughness, "well, I hope you may get your post, child," he said, and rode on.

CHAPTER XI

SIMON closed his eyes, leant back in his pew, and prepared to give his full attention to Mr Cant's expounding of the 103rd Psalm. The day was hot, a bee, which had flown in by the unglazed window, buzzed drowsily round the laird's loft and in spite of his excellent intentions Kelston's thoughts began to drift. He would walk over by the woods towards evening and maybe meet Walter and Ann; there

was a dell by a burnside which she had made especially her own. Golf was, of course, out of the question. He grinned involuntarily as he remembered Halket's horror when he had on one occasion suggested it; possibly he might have ignored Halket's feelings had not Will Morrison shown an equal distress. He would not for worlds hurt Will. On the whole, he thought he had done nothing since that slip to profane the Sabbath, unless, of course, walking the woods was itself a crime. He had not seen Ann since his visit to her mother and it occurred to him now that she had avoided him, or was it he who had avoided her? Certain, the more he thought of it the less he desired to point out to her the advantages of marriage with Glenample. Had she given in? She must marry, he supposed, and Glenample was certainly rich, an easy-tempered fellow too, who should make a good enough husband for some one; some one, yes, but not for Ann, Ann with her innocent eyes and simple country ways. Cuthbert would really be a better match and he was besotted about her. Yet even Cuthbert did not, now he thought of it seriously, seem good enough for the child. He wished he had not promised her mother to speak to her.

Simon opened his eyes again and found to his shame that the preacher had already reached "thirdly." It was certainly very hot in the little church and Simon was growing sleepy. In an effort to rouse himself he leaned forward and looked over the edge of the loft. Then his body stiffened and his eyes fixed themselves intently on a dark corner by the door, to be as swiftly withdrawn lest others noted his interest.

"And fourthly, sirs," rang out the voice of the minister warming to his subject; and now Simon appeared to be giving him fixed attention, only a frown between his eyes showed him troubled.

The service ended at last and the laird was out at the shortest notice; but quick though he was the occupant of the dark corner was quicker and had

already disappeared. As Simon looked about him his eyes fell on the small prim figures of the minister's three daughters waiting hand in hand for a recognition that had become part, and by no means the least joyful part, of their Sabbath ritual; and at the sight of their eager faces Mr Kelston forgot the Fugitive and gave himself up to the business in hand, for in his capacious pocket lay a poke which, when the manse gate was reached, must be transferred swiftly and secretly to the keeping of the eldest Mistress Cant, its toothsome contents thereafter to be scrupulously divided among the trio.

By a little stream that ran through the glen Simon came upon Ann, a book of sermons on her knee and her thoughts far afield, so far that he had time to study her carefully before she realised his presence. She looked pale, he thought, and her eyes were heavy as if she lacked sleep. There was, indeed, a wistful expression in her whole attitude, and Simon found himself wishing once more that Lady Kennedy and her marriage proposals were at the other end of the world. He jumped the burn and threw himself lazily on the bank beside her. She gave a low, startled cry and went rosy as she met his kindly look.

"Pardon, I did not mean to frighten you; but you were so far away. I have stood waiting for you to see me for full two minutes."

"Indeed, sir," she said with a little shrug, "I have been reading Dr Leighton's sermons; they are deeply interesting, I assure you."

"So I observe," he retorted dryly and they both laughed.

"Have you not had enough sermons for to-day?" he asked and took the book from her idly.

"Oh," she said impatiently, "I should be glad to be done with the curate's, they grow more and more foolish. I do not wonder the people will not hear him. To-day I think he was not quite sober, though my mother would see nothing amiss. I was glad Walter was not there."

"Walter was not at church then?" Kelston's tone was not quite as careless as he could have wished, but Ann noticed nothing. Walter, she explained, had one of his severe headaches and had begged to be allowed to keep his chamber. She talked on, flitting from one subject to another. She is afraid, thought Simon, and fell silent watching her. Presently she noticed his silence and stopped in her chatter. "You are not very amusing to-day, sir," she pouted.

"No, nor are you very honest," he answered gravely. "And all the while we are both thinking of that which neither of us dare mention. Are you going to be married, Cousin Ann?"

"Ah!" she cried, "you know then? My mother has told you?" And as he nodded without speaking, "Oh, what am I to do?" she cried and covered her face with her hands.

"Do you dislike him so very much?" he asked gently; and at that she shook her curls but without turning her head. "No, it is not that," and half-petulantly, "he is well enough, I doubt not, but I do not wish to marry."

"My lady is anxious to see you wed," he murmured, throwing a sop to his promise.

"I know, but it is foolish; many women never marry, and even if I must I am not so very old yet."

"Certain, you are not yet of a great age," he agreed. But ignoring his jesting tone she went on, turning to him now with troubled eyes.

"My lady has talked to you of her own health? Do you think she is really ill? She has always been delicate but I do not believe she is in more danger than usual."

"Nay, I trust she may long be spared," he said reassuringly. Then, as she still regarded him with anxious look he went on, "It is not unnatural that she should wish to see you wed," and Lady Kennedy's words coming to his mind he added, "though she would not press my Lord Glenample's suit if you dislike him. There be many would be glad to take his place."

She looked very young and lonely gazing at him wide-eyed, and he put out his hand and took hers, feeling it tremble in his strong grasp.

"Sir Cuthbert Moule, for instance," he hazarded tentatively. And at that her face changed, and snatching her fingers away she shrank as if from a blow. In the next instant she was on her feet looking down at him with eyes full of scorn and, had he had the wit to see it, of hurt pride.

"You are vastly solicitous for my welfare, sir, but you presume too far."

"I ask your pardon; I would not have so presumed without your mother's request," he answered, hurt in his turn; adding more gently, "after all, I am your cousin, Mistress Ann."

But Ann was not appeased. "Perchance my mother solicited your protection for me as well; that would account for your eagerness to get me wed and off your hands, *Cousin Simon*." And then, as he stared at her blankly, far too astounded to think of defending himself, "You fool," she cried, "oh, you fool," and turning, ran from him as fast as her little red-heeled shoes would carry her.

"Of all the spitfires!" said Simon to himself, and having recovered sufficiently from his bewilderment to get to his feet he stood looking after her retreating form, in two minds whether or not to give chase. In another moment he would have done so, for his anger was already waning but fate intervened. Through the wood, crosswise to the path down which Ann had so incontinently fled, picking her steps delicately and singing softly to herself, came the gypsy girl, Grizzie.

Simon had already taken a quick step forward but the sight of her stopped him. He would not have owned, perhaps was hardly aware, that the remembrance of the girl's uncanny, penetrating eyes had aught to do with his change of plan, but it certainly became clear that to chase Mistress Kennedy's flying form would be ridiculous. It was equally certain that he had no desire to meet Grizzie, so turning

on his heel he took the burn in his stride. "And the devil take her ladyship and all her family before I interfere again," he growled wrathfully as he made for Kells.

But for all his protestations Mr Kelston did not keep that resolution very long, for coming presently to his own house he found his secretary sitting in the window of the hall and was thereby reminded of his morning's suspicion.

"Halket!"

Reuben was reading his Bible, his face suitably lengthened for the observance of the Sabbath; but he looked up, startled at the unaccustomed sharpness of his master's tone, and rose as Simon crossed to him.

"It would seem you are giving Sir Walter more instruction than is in the bond and in consequence he is too fatigued to attend the lawful ministrations of his curate."

"The curates are not lawful and Sir Walter does not approve the present sinful oppressions," Reuben muttered sulkily.

"Sir Walter is an Episcopalian as was his father before him. You are not paid to teach him politics. Now, hark ye, Halket; if what happened this morning is repeated I shall write to Burnet that you are unable to give Sir Walter further instruction, as you are leaving my service. Is that clear?" And without waiting for an answer he passed on to his own apartments, leaving Reuben glooming after him, torn between apprehensive self-pity and what he considered a righteous anger.

Simon was not entirely a fool and there had been many young ladies at Whitehall and at St James's willing and eager to teach him the gentle art of love making; but for all his Court training he really knew very little about women, and the more he thought about Ann Kennedy and her strange onslaught the more perplexed he became. Perhaps her very transparency helped to deceive him. With the Court dames he had been on guard, quick to recognise the languishing look and insinuating speech, but that Ann,

with her straightforward ways and boyish outlook, should say one thing and mean another, had not yet occurred to him. She had regarded him always as a sort of elder brother; he had Lady Kennedy's word for that. She had consulted him and asked his advice a hundred times, why then, in the name of wonder, should she suddenly turn and rend him for his innocent enough concern for her welfare? A fool? Well, he admitted humbly enough that he had probably blundered. His own Anne had, he remembered, been petulant anent her marriage, ready to see offence where none was intended, insistent upon praise where she knew well he could not in honesty admire. Girls were like that he supposed, but he did not want to quarrel with his cousin. She had come to mean a good deal to him he realised, and he hated to think of her as unhappy, resenting his well-meant interference. She had looked so small and white standing there with blazing eyes and tightly clenched hands, he wished now that he had given chase and caught her up; yes, literally caught her up and held her high in his arms—oh, damn! he could not have done that now. What a clever devil was King Louis. Had anybody ever invented a more damnable punishment? . . . Well, to-morrow he would go down hat in hand and make humble apology, and tell Mistress Ann not to be so foolish a little one.

Thus Simon to himself; but the morning brought a summons which changed his plans and sent him riding hot haste in the opposite direction. A command from Dalyell for his immediate attendance at Minnigaff, where the General was for the moment residing.

Halket might have felt himself avenged had he known that the reason behind this peremptory order was an accusation brought by the very curate whose rights Mr Kelston had but yesterday censured him for infringing.

The curate had, it appeared, while walking through the New Town been stoned by boys, some of whom he believed came from the Clachan of Kells. The stoning, Dalyell admitted, had resolved itself into a mere

handful of chuckie stanes thrown at random, and the bairns had already been well skelped by their parents; still, a straw showed how the wind blew and Kells parish had a bad reputation. After the incident of Mr Weston's death Simon could not, Dalryell warned him good-naturedly, walk too warily.

"Am I then to be held responsible for every child on my land who overtops his spirits?" Kelston demanded haughtily; but Dalryell's answer fell like a hammer upon his contempt.

"That is just what you are, young man. Have you never read the Bond?" He rose, groped among some papers on a side table and handed Simon a document, watching him with a grim smile as he read it.

"I, ———, do bind and oblige me to keep the public peace and if I fail I shall pay a year's rent; likewise that tenants and men servants shall keep the peace and in case they fail I oblige me to pay for every tenant his year's rent and for every servant his year's fee. And for the more security I am content thir presents to be registrate in the books of the Council."

"Do you ask me to sign this?" Kelston asked.

The General laughed. "No, I shall not insist yet awhile." Then he added more gravely, "But mind, Sim, you have two enemies already in this countryside so it behoves you to have a care."

He would not hear of Simon's returning the following day, he would make him known to the Steward; and Simon, appreciating the real kindliness that lay behind this insistence, could not refuse. It was towards the end of the week, therefore, that he and David rode home again by the Edinburgh Road, surely as steep and lonely as any in the kingdom.

David had been gloomy of late, and as he rode most of the way in silence it occurred to Simon that perhaps the sight of his Lady of Hazels, handsome still but grown a little peevish and quite forgetful of his existence, had been somewhat of a trial to Gourlay, and he was more than usually patient with his man's humour. It was afternoon when they rode over the

shoulder of Craignell and down by the Pulran Burn to the upper ford of Dee. Across it Simon drew rein at the sight of Walter Kennedy's shaggy pony tied to a boulder.

"He is yonder," said David, pointing up the stream, and at the same moment the boy, catching sight of them, laid down his rod and ran towards them.

"I have taken a day off studies," he called laughing. "Where have you been? My mother left her compliments for you. I have got one beauty, Mr Kelston, do come and look at him." He stood looking up at Simon. "My mother and Ann have gone back to town," he said, and frowning a little, "Ann is perhaps to be betrothed but I have not given my consent yet."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE High Street of Edinburgh was agog with excitement, for Mitchell, the would-be assassin of the Archbishop of St Andrews, had that day been captured. It was five years since the Archbishop, while entering his carriage, had been fired at, and the unknown assassin had thereupon made good his escape ; the affair had caused little interest at the time for, though the capital had little sympathy with the fanatics it had even less with the bishops, and the incident had been long forgotten by all but Sharp himself. Upon him, however, the years had but impressed the memory of that face, so full of sinister intent, which had for a moment flashed upon his terrified vision ; now his unceasing watch was rewarded and his enemy was in his power. The capital waited with interest to see what revenge he would take.

Simon heard the news from young Telfer at the Coffee House, into which since coming to town, he was in the habit of turning after dinner for a glass of wine and the news of the day. Telfer, having been promoted to the Guards, had become, in his own eyes at least, a person of much importance ; but he was not forgetful of old friends and had welcomed Mr Kelston with open arms ; indeed, Simon was quite aware that he owed not a little of his easy acceptance by the young bloods of the capital to Telfer's enthusiastic description of his prowess. To-day, finding himself the centre of interest, the young soldier warmed to his tale.

"Truly his Grace hath a marvellous memory, for on my honour there is nothing so extraordinary about

this fellow, yet the moment we brought him in his Grace cries out, 'It is he! It is he!' and goes as white as death."

"Mayhap had it been you the scoundrel tried to kill your memory had served you as well," suggested one of the advocates (for the coffee-house being situated near to the Parliament House was much frequented by the Bar). "Certain, my Lord Archbishop has gone in fear of his life this many a day."

"Which accounts for the way he starts and peers if a stranger cast a glance in his direction," said a second guardsman contemptuously. But at that a restraining voice broke in from the shadowy corner of the fireplace, "Gentlemen, you speak of the Primate."

The guardsmen laughed unabashed and Telfer, refilling his glass, came across and seated himself on the arm of Kelston's chair opposite the speaker. "No offence, Sir George," he said lightly. "Everyone knows the Archbishop is not conspicuous for courage; but is it not extraordinary that having escaped to Holland the fellow should come back and settle at his Grace's very door?"

"Possibly he intended making another attempt; but he may have been enticed back by the mere memory of his crime. The thing is not uncommon in criminal records," said Sir George Mackenzie gravely.

"Which reminds me," said Telfer again. "Here is a question for you lawyers. Logan says they will hang the fellow out of hand, but I tell him they cannot do that without two witnesses, and who else can swear to the man, for who else, asking his Grace's pardon, has given the matter a thought these five years?"

"Get your fee first, gentlemen; he is trying to pick your pockets," said Kelston, and the others smiled.

"They say he was out at Pentland so they will get him on that count, anyway," yawned Logan, the other guardsman. "He is certainly one of the fanatics."

"Hush!" Telfer warned him. "So is Kells, a

regular western Whig—owh ! ” he ended with a grunt, edging from Simon’s dexterously planted elbow.

“ If Mr Kelston is a Whig he keeps his opinion within bounds,” said Sir George smiling, “ and an opinion kept within bounds is a pure act of mind.”

“ You would not punish a man for his opinions, then ? ” Simon asked, looking at the speaker with some interest. He knew that in his youth Mackenzie had defended Argyle, and later had pleaded quarter for the rebels after Pentland ; but these apparently Whig views might be merely in the way of his profession, and he was of late reported to be increasingly in Lauderdale’s confidence.

“ For opinions in themselves, no ; for to punish the body for a sin of the soul is as unjust as to punish one relation for the faults of another.”

“ Which, when you come to think of it, is just what they did when they fined my Lord Cardross for his Lady’s hearing her own Chaplain,” muttered one of the advocates slyly. But Mackenzie, pursuing his own train of thought, took no notice. “ For my part, in all articles not absolutely necessary for being saved, I make the laws of my country my creed ; and by the laws of my country I mean, of course,” he added, “ the religion settled by law.”

“ That would be a comfortable enough situation if the laws of one’s country—or religion fixed thereby—did not change with such rapidity,” said Kelston a trifle dryly. Sir George stiffened. “ Presbyterianism came by rebellion, not by law,” he said.

‘ And Episcopacy by a drunken jest.’ The retort flashed through Kelston’s mind, remembering as he did the King’s amused astonishment when he first heard news of the Rescissory Act, by which the so-called ‘ Drunken Parliament ’ had swept away in one gust all the liberties secured by Scottish Parliaments since his father’s time. But he did not speak it aloud, merely asking, “ In any case, you do not, I take it, consider either form in itself necessary to salvation ? ”

“ I do not,” said Sir George, crossing his legs and

recovering his temper. "Men may believe what they choose and remain real Christians, I doubt not, though they differ from the Church. It is when these not only recede from the canonised creed but likewise encroach upon the laws of the State that they become dangerous, the most dangerous of all law breakers (such as this fellow Mitchell) and therefore to be the most severely punished. For my own part, I judge it is necessary for a Christian to look oftener to his practice than to his confession of faith."

"Yet if his confession includes the belief that the religion settled by law is not that settled by the Scriptures, or for the matter of that by his conscience, how is he to reconcile his practice with the suppression of his belief? I hold no brief for Mitchell, he has attempted murder and will, I doubt not, pay the price, but—the Quakers, for example, are harmless folk."

"The Quakers!" He had the whole room against him now. "Lord! sir, the Quakers are a stinking rabble," said Logan disgustedly, voicing the general belief; but Simon, inwardly amused at the storm he had raised, held his ground with due solemnity. "On the contrary, Mr Penn is a gentleman of no small distinction and one for whom his Highness hath a considerable fondness."

"Such as think they have a church within their own breasts should likewise believe their heads to be steeples and so provide them with bells." Sir George spoke with some asperity, for he half-suspected Mr Kelston of laughing at him, and he disapproved such levity.

"Well," said Telfer, breaking in before Simon could reply, "we cannot sit by the fire all day like you gentlemen of leisure. Though, Lord! I wish we could," he added, swinging on his cloak and looking at the misty rain driving past the window. "What a winter!" His move broke up the party, the advocates remembering their duties, real or imagined, and Sir George returning to the courts to plead with his usual eloquence for certain Militia men accused of murder and abuse where their warrant had only

entitled them to robbery or, to use the more legal phrase, 'poinding.'

Since he had come to Edinburgh it seemed to Simon that he was viewing yet another type of life. The men who frequented the Scottish Court bore little resemblance to the stern country folk among whom his life had lately been spent. Their outlook was wider and less rigid, but it lacked the straight, clean lines and the certainties as to right and wrong which, narrow though it was, had made the life at Kells so simple and refreshing to a tired spirit; on the other hand, they differed essentially from the frivolous, immoral habitués of Whitehall, for, in spite of Lauderdale's coarse brutality and Rothes's drunken good humour, the men who attended their Court, sat with them in Council, or more or less reluctantly bowed to their will in Parliament, were, to outward seeming at least, serious-minded and decorous gentlemen; a trifle bourgeois perhaps in their very respectability, but damnably proud of their long descent and careful to address one another at all times by the title of their parental acres, sadly mortgaged though most of these acres might be.

Simon had come to Edinburgh unwillingly enough, it was so long since he had mixed with his fellows, that rather to his own astonishment he found himself less and less inclined to do so; he had been uncertain, too, as to whether Charles would approve his so far breaking his exile as to attend the Court at Holyrood. Therefore when in '72 the Commissioner came north in state to open Parliament he had not been among those gentlemen who, anxious to prove their loyalty, had hurried to the capital; but when at the end of the following year his Grace returned Kelston found his determination assailed from an unexpected quarter.

The years of comparative quiet which had followed Lauderdale's rise to power and the dismissal of Middleton and his crew had now come to an end. Lauderdale, always afraid that his old Presbyterianism would be used against him, had allowed the bishops

to force his hand ; and fining and imprisonment were once more the lot of these Galloway lairds and their tenants who, unlike Kells, had not the benefit of an indulged minister ; and who, refusing the ministrations of the curates, sought their old pastors in the fields or other conventicles. In spite of his desire to live unnoticed Kelston was too naturally sociable to remain entirely aloof from the life around him ; and so it had come about that, when a deputation of these gentlemen laid before him their manifold grievances and begged him, as personally known to the Commissioner, to represent these to him, Kelston, after a further hesitancy, had consented to test his position and if opportunity arose to act as mediator or, at least, as advocate for his neighbours.

It had not been without some doubt, however, that Simon had presented himself before the Dictator ; for though Lauderdale had in the past been kind enough to his young countryman, even when he professed to scoff at his fiddling and to reprove Charles for not seeing to it that he got some learning, his position, he was well aware, was now very different ; he had been relieved, therefore, when he found the Duke more than ready to receive him.

“ So you let the lady slip through your fingers ? ” his Grace had said, greeting him with bluff friendliness, and Simon’s eyes had opened a trifle widely till with a flash he had remembered ; Lauderdale had not seen him since the morning of the Princess Mary’s birthday near on four years before ; seemed the Duke forgot nothing.

“ It needs more than five of them to hold a woman, your Grace.” He had held them out and the Duke’s shaggy eyebrows had drawn together. “ Eh ? What ? Ah yes, his Majesty told me, you arrant young fool.”

What exactly his Majesty had told Lauderdale Simon never discovered ; but he was glad to have made the plunge and to find his head once more above water, for Lauderdale, having abused him roundly, forthwith led him without further question

across the chamber and presented him to his new Duchess.

*"She is Besse of my heart, she is Besse of old Noll,
She was once Fleetwood's Besse, now she's Besse of Atholle."*

Unbidden the ribald parody he had heard that day sung by some huckster in the Lawnmarket had come into his mind as he had bowed over her hand ; but she was certainly handsome and, taking her cue from her husband, had been exceedingly gracious. A bit of a shrew he had realised as he listened to her biting comments on the raw youths and country squires come to pay their court to the Commissioner. She had a caustic tongue but a witty one, and he had found himself slipping back with a pleasant sense of ease into the familiar atmosphere to which he had been so long a stranger. While she, in her turn, had professed her delight in talking once more to a man who knew the world, and had plied him with compliments which, for all he had enough sense to take them at their value, were yet reminiscent of the old days when compliments had been showered upon him by those who believed him to have an interest with the King.

The Duchess must know he had none now, but he had not doubted he would discover soon enough what she wanted ; and in the meantime the old game had proved vastly entertaining, until, tossing the ball of repartee and compliment idly back and forward, he had become aware of a tall figure making stately progress towards them. The full handsome face was familiar, but for a moment as he had listened to some gossip of Whitehall which the Duchess was relating, he had searched his memory in vain. Then the name had come, of course—Glenample. At the same instant the Duchess, looking up, had seen the newcomer, then with a deliberate gesture she had laid her fingers on Simon's arm.

"But I forget, you have not been here before ? You must see the new gallery ; his Grace is justly proud of it," and with a faint pressure he had found himself wheeled about and led, somewhat to his

embarrassment, in the opposite direction from that of the approaching nobleman.

The thing had been done so swiftly, so neatly, that had he not caught a fleeting gleam in her eyes he might have believed she had really not been aware of the newcomer's presence; as it was—What the devil had Glenample of all people done to offend her?

As to that she had not been long in enlightening him. Glenample, it appeared, belonged to the Hamilton party, and his Grace Duke Hamilton, my Lord Tweeddale (his defaulting had come as a surprise to Kelston who knew nothing of Lauderdale's recent quarrels) and others had dared to withstand the Commissioner—were even now gone to London to turn the King's mind against him if they could. This and much more the Duchess had told him with a wealth of execration which Nellie in one of her rare tempers could hardly have equalled. Kelston's training had stood him in good stead at that moment; he was expert in sympathising without committing himself unduly; all the same he wished it had not been Glenample who so roused her ire, or that he at least had not been made party to the administering of his reprimand.

In her fierce denunciation, too, he had learnt the reason of his own charming reception; in anger the Duchess was not so clever as in her calmer moments, and through her arrogance he read her fears. Lauderdale was growing old (Simon had been shocked at the change in the Commissioner), he had never been popular, and now the opposition was daily growing in strength as one by one he alienated his old friends. The Duchess had spoken proudly of the King's defence of his Minister, but it was clear that she had no real trust in Charles. Simon might be in disgrace and useless but, until she was sure of that she could not afford to be anything but gracious to even so insignificant a friend of the King.

"His coming to-day is but to spy, an insult," she had flared, returning again to Glenample.

"And my Lady Glenample?" he had asked, and

regretted it the moment after for she had caught him up with a sneer. "She? He leaves her in the country, she hath no power with him." A wife without power was clearly in her Grace's eyes a thing of contempt; but Simon was not so sure that Ann had not as much power as she chose to have over her easy-tempered lord. There was, he surmised shrewdly, another reason for her non-appearance at Holyrood, for looking about him he had noted that Glenample was by no means the only man who left his lady at home; and knowing something of the Duchess's reputation he had not been inclined to blame my lord too severely for leaving his wife in the country. Having, therefore, learned what he wanted to know he had turned the talk from her as adroitly as might be.

To-day, facing the bitter east wind that swept the High Street as he made his way to the shop of Mr Patrick Chalmers, the beltmaker, Simon's thoughts turned again to his cousin. Even now he did not care to remember too intimately the early days of her betrothal, for his own feelings had, he was bound to admit, unpleasantly resembled those of the proverbial dog in the manger. What had he, a ruined and crippled man with his heart already buried in that far French sepulchre, to offer to this other Ann in place of the wealth and high position that my Lord Glenample could lay at her feet? Yet he had hated the thought of her marriage, had suffered, he who had believed he could never suffer again, so numb and dead had his heart seemed. Even that glimpse of Glenample at the palace, stately and prosperous, with his two white be-ringed hands, had given him a twinge uncomfortably suggestive of jealousy. Well, he devoutly hoped the child was happy. And with his head well down against the stinging rain Simon collided suddenly with a gentleman coming from the opposite direction.

Both men stepped back with hasty apology; and then the other exclaimed, "Mr Kelston! by all that is wonderful."

"You have the advantage of me, sir——" began Simon, but corrected himself on the instant. "No, bless my soul! it is Sir Cuthbert Moule, a grown-up, elongated edition, by my troth! 'Nearer to heaven than when I last saw you by the altitude of a chopine'."

Sir Cuthbert laughed excitedly. "Grown up? I should think I am; why I am near on twenty-two."

"A very patriarch," murmured Simon. "And what, if one may ask your eldership, brings you to this far town? We keep fine weather, do we not?" He was uncommonly pleased to see the lad.

"I have made the Grand Tour," explained Cuthbert. "She—she said I had no education, she was right, of course, I have learnt a great deal these three years; though I shall never be anything but an ass, I am afraid," he added with a return of modesty.

Simon abandoned his errand to the beltmaker; and slipped his hand through Cuthbert's arm. He had an uncomfortable presentiment of what the boy's next question would be and an instinctive objection to dealing the blow in the street. "Come to my lodging," he said. "This is no day to stand in the rain, let us make merry indoors."

Cuthbert assented readily but the next moment he hesitated, a spasm of doubt crossing his face. "You—you are not married?" he blurted out. Simon laughed, "I am not," he said, and wondered why the boy's relief was so evident.

CHAPTER II

MR KELSTON had secured excellent lodgings in the house of one Mr George Campbell, a meal merchant, who owned a handsome stone tenement known as Campbell's Land at the head of Rae's Close in the Canongate; his apartment was on the third floor and his bedchamber which looked out, not upon the street but over pleasant gardens to the Calton Craig beyond, was near as quiet as his turret room at Kells.

"I stayed in London but two nights and was lucky enough to procure a place in the York coach, from which town I hired horses from the postmaster and came to Alnwick near to where my own house is." Thus Cuthbert, when they were comfortably settled in the oak-panelled dining room and David had replenished the fire, brought pipes and wine, and left them to themselves. "I stayed but to see my mother and came on here."

"To pay your court to her Grace of Lauderdale?" Simon enquired, pleasantly ironic. Sir Cuthbert laughed. He seemed in the last few minutes to be in the highest spirits. "Oh, maybe," he agreed. "I was glad to be quit of London at least, it has changed these three years and become mighty dull. The King was at Windsor, but his Royal Highness was at St James's with his new wife. I do not envy her, poor child; the city was in an uproar over the marriage, 'tis said—but I doubt not I bring you stale news."

"No," Simon shook his head, "I hear little from the Court these days. Mistress Gwyn sends me word at times and her Grace of Richmond."

"Richmond? You have heard maybe to whom the King has given the dukedom since her husband's death? To De Kéroualle's son. Lord! Soon we'll have none that be not bastards," he added rather incoherently.

Simon frowned. The poor Duchess had indeed written bitterly of what she deemed an insult though not one she dared resent; but Simon would discuss the King with no man.

"Mistress Kennedy lives in Edinburgh, I am told?" Cuthbert got to his point at last, feeling himself growing hot about the tips of his ears; but Mr Kelston had stooped to add another log to the blaze. "Not—since her marriage," he said without looking up. The young man caught his breath with a short, dry sound, and for a moment there was nothing more to be heard save the crackling of the fresh log. Then Mr Kelston began to speak rather quickly. "She was married near on three years ago to my Lord Glenample. You will

remember Glenample, I expect ? He has a fine house in the Borders, I am told, and is one of the few lords in Scotland who has more money than debts." Still no sound came from the boy. "They might have told you," muttered Simon ; he felt as if he had hurt something very young and defenceless.

"Three years ago," said Cuthbert in a voice from which all life seemed to have gone. He got up and stood leaning against the mantelshelf, his face hidden on his arm. "Three years—all the time I have been away." Suddenly he raised his head and looked down at Simon. "But I do not understand," he muttered unsteadily. "Glenample ? how could she marry Glenample ? Some one must have forced her into that. How could you let her do it ?"

"I ?" said Simon, taken aback.

"Yes, you—you must have known she cared for you ? Every one knew it, at least Mistress Blagge did, and of course I always knew ; but you never seemed to care, and I hoped. When I came back and found you both gone I own I was afraid ; but then, just now, when you told me you were not married, Lord ! I was happy, I thought mayhap now I might have a chance. There had never been any one else but you, she never looked at Glenample though I remember he paid her some attention." He had control of himself again but he still stood, his hands clenched at his sides, looking down at Simon. "I—I have always loved her," he said very low.

"I know," said Simon gently. "She was worth loving."

"Yet you allowed her to marry Glenample. I think if you had married her yourself I could have borne it, but—Glenample !"

"Sit down," said Simon, pointing to the chair. He could not argue with this unbending, denunciatory young judge. "I think you exaggerate my power," he went on as Cuthbert sank back wearily into the proffered seat. "Mistress Kennedy liked me as—an elder brother. I have her mother's word for that."

"Her mother's!" said Cuthbert; and for a moment Simon had a curious feeling that he was about to add "You fool," but if so, he checked himself.

"How could I ask her to marry me?" Simon found he was defending himself before those accusing, tragic eyes. "I have nothing to offer a woman—a broken man with an old keep and scarce enough money to buy her gloves, and I am more than ten years her senior."

"Glenample must be four times that," said Cuthbert.

"Yes, but he is a rich man, he can give her position, wealth, the sort of things a woman needs," and as Cuthbert only shook his head, Simon unfastened his shirt cuff, swept back the lace frill from his wrist, and held out the mutilated stump. "You would not ask a woman to bed with that o' nights," he said bitterly, for Cuthbert had winced in spite of himself.

"I did not know," Sir Cuthbert stammered, and turned his eyes from it to fix them with horrified question on Simon's face. "Was it a duel?"

"No, an axe, the axe of King Louis' hangman." This time it was Kelston who stumbled to his feet, he pushed the wine towards Cuthbert. "Best have a drink," he said, for the boy looked uncommon sick and white, and with that he crossed to the window and stood looking out at the wind-swept street. He had never told anyone that before; but at least it had given the lad something else to think of than his own trouble. Was what he said of Ann Kennedy true? Was that the meaning of her sudden outburst? 'A fool'? Yes, he had been a fool, and just now he had been worse, a mountebank exposing his deformities like a hunchback at a fair.

"Mr Kelston, forgive me for being an ass; you took me by surprise and I was upset by what you had already told me and—I do not believe she would have let that count either," Cuthbert's voice behind him ended almost in a whisper.

Simon swung round and held out his left hand. "'Twas I behaved like a fool," he owned, as Cuthbert wrung it heartily. "I am ashamed of myself, but I

fancy you startled me too. If what you told me is true—I give you my word I never suspected it—then I must be more than ever ashamed. She once called me a fool and seems she was right,” he ended with a wry smile. “Anyway, you are the man she ought to have married, I always knew that.” And at the moment he honestly believed he had.

They came back to the fire and sat listening to the splash of rain talking in a desultory fashion of Whitehall, Cuthbert’s travels, and old times.

“I could not lay you in a hedge now, even if I had two hands,” Simon smiled in answer to the other’s reminder of their first meeting. Sir Cuthbert had certainly added to his inches though he would never be a Saul among the people; he was thinner than he used to be and more athletic, a good-looking youth with something simple and straightforward about him that was attractive. Yes, Ann might have done worse than marry this man, Simon thought ruefully.

“She is not in town at all, you say?” Cuthbert asked abruptly after they had smoked awhile in silence.

“So said her Grace. She would have it that my Lord neglects her by leaving her in the country, but I will do him the justice to think that it might be care for her reputation rather than neglect.”

“I shall go and see her,” said Sir Cuthbert quietly, “I must know if she be happy.”

“And if not, can you add to her happiness?” Simon asked doubtfully; but Sir Cuthbert had become dour on the sudden. “I do not know,” he said, “but I must see her once.”

He was lodging at an inn by the Water Gate, called, it was said, after a white charger of Queen Mary. A dirty uncomfortable place Cuthbert thought it, comparing all Scottish inns unfavourably with those beyond the Border. “Why not come here?” Kelston suggested. “There is an unused chamber and I should be glad of your company; I would have gone home myself a week since, but his Grace would not hear of it, and I own to wishing not to offend him. You will be perfectly free, your servant can come and go

easily, for the White Horse is but a step from here." An offer which Cuthbert readily accepted.

After he had gone and orders had been given to prepare for him, Simon went to his own room; he was surprised to find how tired, and yet how restless he felt. Going to the window he stood for a few minutes looking out. Between the gardens of Campbell's Land and the opposite house the close ran down between high walls to a lane at the foot of the Craig. It was little frequented at any time and to-day was likely to be deserted. Simon's attention was attracted, therefore, by the unexpected sight of a man and woman sheltering in the archway of a broken-down house. He could not see much of the woman, but the man, whose back was towards him, seemed familiar; he was talking with great earnestness and a wealth of gesticulation, and as Simon watched idly his mind on other matters, he turned, lifting his hands above his head as if to expostulate with Heaven, and then walked swiftly away. It was Reuben Halket. Amused to catch the immaculate Halket so deeply moved by a woman, Simon looked at her, but her hood was drawn down over her face and he could see little; his thoughts had gone back to his own affairs when a curious sound made him look again. A second woman, tall, bent, and old, was coming up the close; the tip-tap of her crutch came distinctly to his ears, and as he looked back at the younger woman his interest was aroused for she was shrinking against the arch, her cloak drawn about her, her whole attitude expressing extreme terror.

For a moment it seemed as if the old woman would pass without noticing the crouching figure, but no sooner had she done so than swinging round upon her crutch and shooting out a long arm she seized the other, and dragged her, unresisting, out into the light. There was something so sudden and sinister in her movements that for a moment Simon stood rooted to his place; but when, to his horror, he saw the old woman's bony fingers fasten about her victim's slim neck as she held her pinned against the wall, action

returned and he was out and down the stairs three steps at a time, nearly upsetting Halket on the first landing.

"She is murdering the girl," he shouted and disappeared down the last flight before the astounded Reuben had time to regain his breath and enquire as to his meaning. The murderess, if indeed she meant to carry her vile purpose to a finish, seemed too engrossed to heed him, and he was on her before she saw him and had struck heavily at her arm so that with a scream she loosened her grasp ; but in the next moment she had leapt back and turned upon him with her crutch raised, cursing him and seeming in her fury to overtop even his height.

"Fool," she shrilled, "would you come between me and my lawful slave ; Satan take you both," and with that she struck at him with the weighted end of her crutch. But the girl, who had sunk to her knees when the woman's fingers left her throat, came to herself with a cry. "No, no, Witch, you shall not touch him," and, as if the strength she had had no power to use for her own defence had come back to her, she flung herself between Kelston and the descending blow, pushing him back with the strength of despair as the crutch came down with a sickening thud on her raised arm.

Simon caught her as she dropped, and before he could lay her gently on the ground the woman had made off down the close, swinging along on her wonderful crutch with extraordinary rapidity.

"Oh, sir, she is dead, the witch has killed her, my poor lost lamb. Oh, Grizzie, Grizzie !" Reuben had followed his master as soon as his scattered wits grasped his intent ; but far from being of any use, all he could do was to stand wringing his hands and crooning over the unconscious girl in a very ecstasy of fear.

"For the love of Heaven, Reuben, are you mad or am I, or are we both dreaming ? Anyway, mad or not, help me to carry this poor creature into shelter, I fear her arm be broken.

Between them they carried the girl upstairs and laid her on Reuben's bed.

"Losh me!" said David, called in by Simon, who knew the old soldier's medical skill. "Losh me, if it isn't yon gypsy brat from Garryford!"

"Oddsfish!" said Simon, "so it is." For her hood having fallen back, he could see her gold-brown hair, and when he came to think of it, the girl was not so easily forgotten.

"Of course it is Grizzie, poor sweet soul," murmured Reuben, "but she has not seen Garryford for near on two years."

"You seem to know a deal about the wench," said his master, and David, busy cutting the sleeve from the injured arm, grunted assent.

"More than he ought to know, seeing she is naught but a gypsy's brat and a heathen forbye," he muttered. But Reuben caught him up.

"And whose fault may that be? 'How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they believe without a preacher.' Who dares say for certain that she be not one of the elect?"

David sniffed audibly, but Simon thought it time to interfere.

"Let be," he commanded. "It is her body not her soul you are trying to save for the nonce, and—she is coming to, David."

Sure enough at that moment Grizzie opened her eyes, and her look, passing from Gourlay to Reuben in puzzled surprise, came to Simon, and, at sight of him meaning and light came back to her face, then of a sudden she smiled. Simon had never seen Grizzie smile; few folk had; and the smile illumined her small pale face under its halo of gold, so that at the moment even David might have hesitated in his condemnation of her spiritual state and Reuben caught his breath in rapturous admiration.

"She did not touch you? I am glad," whispered Grizzie.

"I have to thank you for that, but I fear she has hurt you, my dear," Simon said gently.

"I would not have her touch you; she is a witch and evil," the girl stated calmly. And then she lay still and uncomplaining while David deftly set and bound the injured arm.

After that nothing would keep her; she was quite well, she could walk with ease, she had not far to go. Whether near or far they would get a chair for her, Simon insisted; but she was stubborn till, sitting up, she found the room unsteady, and so was persuaded to rest again till a chair was fetched. "Where do you live?" Kelston asked her; "you may as well tell me, for I intend to see you there in safety."

She looked at him again with her old secret gaze and just a suspicion of mischief lurking at the corners of her pouting mouth.

"I am at Glenample House in the High Street, sir; I am maid to my lady."

"The devil you are? So you got your post," laughed Kelston.

He went with her as he had promised, walking by the side of her chair. Her ladyship would not be at home, she told him, having driven, in spite of the rain, to visit a sick friend at Restalrig. They had come to town but three days before.

He left her at the gate of the forecourt with the promise, unwillingly extracted from him to say nothing to her ladyship. The girl had her story perfectly pat when he asked how she intended to account for her broken arm; she had fallen, the streets being so slippery with the sleet, and a sharp edge of cobble had done the damage.

"But why lie?" he had asked her and again she had her answer; witches were uncanny folk to have knowledge of and there were those in the household who would be glad to have such a handle against her. If he might not speak he could not have the woman hunted down and she was a danger; but at that Grizzie became frenzied; courage she certainly had, as witness her soundless endurance of David's doctoring, but, where this woman was concerned she was frankly terrified, and Simon had finally consented to her wish.

CHAPTER III

GLENAMPLE HOUSE stood back from the High Street with its own gateway and forecourt ; a little overshadowed by the tall lands between it and the street, it was nevertheless a handsome residence with an old garden sloping down to the Nor' Loch. It had been built before the troubles in the late King's reign, but had been added to and redecorated by my lord for his second marriage. Comparing it with his own bare keep, Simon felt more than ever assured that he could not have competed with Glenample.

Now that he knew Ann to be really in town it behoved him, as well as Cuthbert, to call upon her. Cuthbert indeed, overwhelmed by shyness now that he knew her to be so near, suggested they should go together ; but Simon, remembering the effect of his well-meant introduction of Cuthbert's name at their last meeting, had no intention of repeating his mistake with the young man in person. He would have given him the preference had not Cuthbert in this also hung back ; Simon was her cousin, it was but seemly he should be the first to call upon her. So Simon went, and was received by my Lady Glenample in her private parlour, with its walls panelled with tapestry after the latest French fashion, and herself very stately in a velvet gown and a new air of dignity that suited well the great lady she was become. Yet she was the same Ann as he was not long in discovering, unfeignedly glad to see him, eager to hear news of Kells and Pulquhanity, to laugh with him over her own early difficulties in the management of her great household at Glenample, and to talk of Walter with that little touch of motherly anxiety which had always amused him. The boy was leaving the University and would begin his studies for the Bar this summer ; my lord had offered to send him upon the Grand Tour but her mother dreaded to have him go so far from her. A pity, thought Simon, a little seeing of the world would

have done Walter no harm and could indeed work wonders, and, as the subject came about so naturally, he told her of the improvement in Sir Cuthbert and of his being in Edinburgh. If she remembered the last mention of his name she showed no sign of it, expressing her pleasure at the prospect of seeing him again and some amusement at his having grown. "He used to be disturbed by his lack of inches, so, for his sake, I am glad."

Wine and syllabubs were brought in and a strange new concoction of leaves and hot water which was becoming fashionable at Court but was still almost unknown in Edinburgh. The Earl, it appeared, was dining with the Chancellor. Ann, Simon noticed, spoke little of her husband, yet brought his name in easily enough when occasion arose. It was evident that he was generous and there was nothing to suggest a neglected or down-trodden wife about his countess. Simon enquired for Lady Kennedy; he had endeavoured to pay his respects to her on first coming to Edinburgh, but had been told that she was gone to Glenample for Christmas and had not yet returned. She was in her usual health Ann told him, not strong of course, but wonderfully cheerful in spite of the bitter autumn. They had left her at Glenample, however, as the weather was really too bad for her to travel. Did Ann remember the enforcing plea of her mother's weakness which had so successfully entrapped her? It seemed to Simon that for a moment her eyes refused to meet his, and her fingers were busy over the dishes of tea as she turned the talk to other things. What a bad year the last had been, they had cut no corn till October, and even then much of it had been green, and now, with March upon them, the rain had but turned to snow; her own maid had slipped on the frosty road only the other day and broken her arm. And so the talk passed from one thing to another, to the new Duchess of York, to the Masque of Calisto performed at Court in December, an account of which Mistress Blagge had written in her last letter to her friend. "It must have been a wondrous sight so

many fine dresses and jewels ; the Ladies Mary and Anne among the performers and my dear herself, in the principal part, covered with jewels. Poor soul, she was in terrible distress over the loss of one worth £80 and borrowed from the Countess of Sussex, but the Duke, she wrote, had made it good ; indeed, from what she wrote of the press, I wonder she lost not more."

And at that my Lord Glenample opened the door and ceremoniously asked permission to enter his lady's parlour.

"Come in, my lord, I am glad you are returned in time, for I have here an old friend, my cousin of Kells ; you are, I think, already acquainted ? "

My lord had entered smilingly, but at the name a change came over his flushed but affable countenance and he drew himself up with a haughty stare.

"Mr Kelston surely honours me unduly when he condescends to visit my wife in private, though he does not choose to recognise her husband publicly."

"My lord !" cried Ann aghast, and had she known it, poor child, did not better Mr Kelston's cause by her instinctive movement to his side.

"My lord is right," said Simon gravely, "in so far that I do owe him an apology for an action which I think he must nevertheless admit was forced upon me."

"Forced upon him, my lady," sneered Glenample, "by her Grace of Lauderdale, whose tool he is."

"That is a lie," cried Ann. "Simon would never be a tool to that woman, nor to any other."

Her husband shot her a quick glance ; standing very erect, her fair face flushed and her eyes bright with anger, he had never seen her look more attractive, and in his own way Glenample was in love with his wife, but that very fact could but add to his present bitterness.

"I deeply regret, my lady," said Kelston, his cool pleasant voice carrying instant comfort to her troubled heart, "that through my stupidity—you will, I know, believe it was through nothing worse—I have subjected you to this unpleasant discussion ; I ask your pardon, and thank you."

She gave him her hand. She was very white now and there were tears behind the anger in her eyes but she still held her head high, and he realised with a quickening of admiration that even in her distress she had remembered to give him her left hand. He gave it a faint reassuring squeeze before raising it to his lips, and then turning to the Earl continued blandly, "I can give your lordship all the explanation," and dropping his voice so that the word should reach the Earl's ear only, he added—"and satisfaction you require, but this is surely not a discussion that her ladyship need be troubled with. Campbell's in Rae's Close will find me at your service."

"If he does not send me a challenge before night, I suppose I must send one to him," Simon said to Cuthbert, as he recounted the incident, pacing restlessly up and down the room, "the whole thing is so damned silly; but the fact is, the fellow was drunk, no, not tipsy. I will do him the credit to own he carries his wine like a gentleman, but no man can dine with my Lords Rothes and Hamilton and come away as sober as he went. He must have known perfectly well that I could not help myself that day at Holyrood, I was as much taken aback as he was, and as soon as I could with decency I got away from the woman and went to look for him, but he had gone. I blame myself," he added reflectively, "for not seeking him out later, but to say truly I forgot all about it. If he were not Ann's husband I should be glad enough to chance pricking a little of his pomposity but——" He took another turn about the room and came back to kick a log impatiently into place. "Telfer will act for me, I doubt not." And in answer to Cuthbert's indignant protest, "No, for Ann's sake, you must not be mixed up in this; it might mean cutting you off, too, and she may need you, who knows."

"But can——" began Cuthbert and stopped, blushing under Simon's angry stare. "Do you know anything of my lord's skill with a sword?" he altered his question lamely.

"I know he is fat and scant of breath," snapped

Simon, "and that I will have to be careful not to hurt him," he added gloomily, "I cannot be as certain of that as——"

"As when you dotted me all over with white chalk," laughed Cuthbert, delighted to retrieve his slip.

David came in to announce that a Captain Scott desired an interview with Mr Kelston.

"Good, show him in, David; and you, Moule, get into the other room, if you please, I will see him alone," an order which Cuthbert unwillingly obeyed, comforting himself with the remembrance of Simon's reason for refusing his help, but mighty envious of Telfer nevertheless.

The closing of the outer door some minutes later told him of the visitor's departure, and coming back he found Kelston, his good humour entirely restored, looking out a couple of buttoned foils.

"To-morrow at midday on Leith Links; most people are dining and it will be quiet enough. I have sent Reuben to ask Captain Telfer to sup with us to-night. This man Scott is a cousin of Glenample's. I warned him that if we were to fight after noon, he had best keep his principal from dining with the Chancellor; he laughed and admitted the advice sound. Now then, Cuthbert, take a foil and let us see what Besnard has done for you."

CHAPTER IV

'February 27th, 1674.—There is something which I do not understand; David Gourlay will never speak with me of our master, yet I think he, too, is troubled. A strange gentleman called upon Mr Kelston to-night, and afterwards Mr Kelston desired me, if I would, to take a message to Captain Telfer, bidding him to supper. I was to add that there was a matter of some importance anent which his advice was required. On what matter that is not carnal can this malignant advise my master? Yet when Mr Kelston asks me, as he did to-night, not of right (though the right be his),

but as if I could bestow a favour upon him, I can refuse him nothing.

On my return I heard the clashing of swords, and on rushing in I found him and Sir Cuthbert fighting, and, for a moment fearing they had of a truth quarrelled, I besought them to desist, but they only laughed at me declaring they but played. Such play is not seemly for Christian gentlemen. Yet I know that Mr Kelston, though he be but one-handed and that his left, delights in such sport; I have seen him teaching Sir Walter Kennedy at Kells. There is indeed a mystery about Mr Kelston's hand; it is reported he lost it in a duel, but when I asked him if this was true, intending to illustrate thereby the sinfulness of such employment, he looked at me with gravity and replied, rolling his R's as he affects at times when he speaks slowly, that it was not. 'For, Reuben,' said he, 'it was in fact bitten off by a lion when I was but hunting rats in the Royal Menagerie; therefore,' said he, 'we do not talk about it!'

Now it is clear that this cannot be true, the more so that on making inquiry of David Gourlay as to whether such a sport was possible, he, looking at me as he does at times, sourly, answered only, that saving my book learning, I was something of a fool, which I take to be a denial of the whole tale. A fool? Perhaps I am, Grizzie has at times said the same, and indeed there is much about Mr Kelston that I do not understand; yet, for all his faults, I love him. He has indeed the carnal virtues in large measure, but I fear for his soul, he himself seeming to give it so little heed; I think he must resemble that man of whom the Lord said, looking upon him, that he was not far from the Kingdom of Heaven. Draw him within, O Lord, if he be of Thine elect. Lord, enable me to mourn for the sins of those who mourn not for themselves, most of all bewailing my own so manifest backslidings.

Surely it is my truckling with the Indulgence which hinders my growth in grace. 'Touch not, taste not, handle not.' But Mr Kelston wills not that I absent

myself from the preaching of the indulged minister of the parish, and I am as wax in Mr Kelston's hands ; nevertheless, the Lord is mighty above all, and there has been much true and satisfying preaching in the fields of late.

Mr Telfer came, went away again, and returned ; they have been long in Mr Kelston's chamber with the door shut ; but even now they came out together and, as they passed the door of my closet, I heard him say, ' Twelve o'clock then, shall I bring chairs ? ' to which Mr Kelston answered quickly, ' No, it will warm our blood the better to walk in this bitter weather.' Mr Kelston, I have noticed, will never go in a sedan, he says they cramp him, and certainly he is of uncommon height. What is this business of to-morrow ? My heart misdoubts me.'

*' February 28th.—*Spare him, O Lord ! Spare him in Thy mercy, cut him not off in his sins, O Gracious God. ' They that take the sword shall perish by the sword,' yet is Thy Hand strong to save. And if what Sir Cuthbert says be the truth (Thou knowest all things) then did he not take the sword to kill, though he might with ease have done so. Lord ! Lord ! if Thou wilt save him, lo ! I covenant with Thee, I will go no more to hear any but Thy true Remnant. Yea, Lord, even though he himself turn me from his door for disobedience, I will not again enter the churches of the indulged ; so help me God.

My misdoubtings of last night were more than fulfilled. Sir Cuthbert and Mr Kelston dined early and then Mr Kelston went out. He was in very good spirits, but Sir Cuthbert was gloomy, and I overheard him say something to the effect that, if he too chose to walk on the links no one could object, at which Mr Kelston laughed and said that he must do as he chose, but he would not have him mixed up in the business. After he had gone, Sir Cuthbert also went out, and it was laid upon me to follow. He took coach at the Water Gate and I heard him bid drive to an inn at Leith, by which I knew he would there dismiss the coach, not wishing it to be known what was

intended. I am quick upon my feet, and I ran so that I easily kept the coach within sight, and on coming near the inn, as I suspected, Sir Cuthbert got out, dismissed it, and presently walked away towards the links, I following till we came to the sand dunes where he went carefully, not wishing to attract attention, and I as carefully behind him. The day was bitter cold and the snow already beginning to fall.

There were four gentlemen standing in a hollow where the ground was more even; two were Mr Kelston and Captain Telfer, the third I recognised as he who had visited Mr Kelston last night, the fourth I knew not, though I have since had too good cause to learn his name, but there being secrecy about it, I had best not write it.

As I hesitated what to do I heard Mr Kelston say very clear in answer, I doubt not to some proposal already spoken, "I thank you, my lord, but I am not too disabled to give satisfaction to any who desire it," and with that he steps back, makes a pass with his sword, and the other doing likewise, they fell to; I would at that have rushed forward and besought them to desist and have thought for their immortal souls, but Sir Cuthbert saw me and pulled me back. And after that I know not well what happened save that Sir Cuthbert told me not to fear, for that it was evident from the first that Mr Kelston was master, and that he knew he intended nothing worse than to vindicate his honour by some slight prick; and indeed, it was wonderful to watch how he kept my lord off, and he waxing the hotter as he found himself checked. Even from where we stood crouched behind the sand dunes, I could hear him beginning to pant, for he was a stout man and not young, though I do think what Sir Cuthbert said was true, and that Mr Kelston was not pressing him unduly. Then of a sudden my lord's foot slipped and I shut my eyes, for it seemed not possible but that Mr Kelston's sword must pierce his heart, and with that I heard Sir Cuthbert cry out and knew myself alone; and so

having prayed for God His mercy, I looked up and it was my lord who stood still upright, his bloody sword in his hand, and my dear master in Mr Telfer's arms. Then I, too, ran forward.

'He dropped his point,' my lord was saying, and repeated it as a thing amazing to him, 'he dropped his point.'

'If he had not, you had been a dead man,' said his gentleman, and added as to himself, 'he had you at his mercy a dozen times.'

Mr Kelston drew himself erect, his sword had dropped to his feet and his hand was pressed to his side. I could see the blood oozing from between his fingers. 'My lord's foot slipped,' he said, 'the fault was not his, you can witness to that if there is need,' and with that he sank back again in Mr Telfer's arms and I saw his head fall forward on his breast.

'You,' cried my lord catching sight of me, 'run to the road yonder where my coach is and fetch my surgeon who is within it, and tell the coachman to drive as near as may be.'

I did as I was bidden, but my mind was darkened. I remember nothing clearly, only that on my return Sir Cuthbert bade me run again as quickly as I could to prepare David Gourlay and have my master's bed warmed, bidding me also with some sharpness that I say naught of this matter to any, which was indeed far from my thought.

I would I could do anything to help him, but David Gourlay will let none attend Mr Kelston but himself. They have another physician, a worthy gentleman, though brother to that malignant professor, Mr Gilbert Burnet, an unworthy member of a godly house. The snow falleth heavily. 'He that knoweth the good and doeth it not to him is the sin': surely if I had run forward even then I might have persuaded them? Sir Cuthbert's hand was on me; but it was not that which held me back, but fear of Mr Kelston's anger. Twice only have I seen him angered, once when he found Sir Walter was attending the church at Kells, and again when I found courage to remon-

strate with him against his correspondence with that abandoned woman, the King's mistress. He says little at such times, but the quieter he becomes the more I am afraid. O God! how terrible to know the right and do it not from fear. Had I but taken courage to reprove sin, I had not had this challenge upon me to answer whether or no I, even I, am not guilty of his blood!

I heard David Gourlay come out as I wrote these words; he told Sir Cuthbert that Mr Kelston was asleep and he would take this opportunity to fetch some things he needed from the apothecary. He left the door of the bedchamber a little ajar, and Sir Cuthbert, having his back to it, he sitting in the dining-room, I saw that it was possible to slip across without his noticing; I had no thought but to look upon my dear master for a moment while he slept; but as I entered he turned his head a little and seeing me (for I think he had only feigned sleep to comfort Gourlay), he called me softly. I went across and knelt by the bed and kissed his hand, weeping a little; at the which he laid it on my shoulder, looking at me in his old quizzing way and whispered, 'Tut, lad, I am not so easily killed as you think,' and then, for I think he was in some pain, he frowned, closing his eyes; but when I would have turned to go, fearing Gourlay's return, he stopped me, saying. 'This was an accident, Reuben, we were at play for a wager and the button came off. You will remember that if you are questioned?' And then, knowing me and feeling perhaps that I hesitated, he laughed very softly. 'Poor Reuben, you do so hate lying, but there is truth in this and we cannot let my lord suffer for it,' and once more I could do nothing but mutter that I would remember; for indeed how could I have refused him anything as he lay there in weakness and pain, he who is so strong and ever generous. Once again he opened his eyes, 'Reuben,' and as I bent over him, 'in my coat, the inner pocket, see if it is safe.' I did not know of what he talked, half fearing his mind wandered; but because he seemed troubled I

did as he bade me, and sure enough in the pocket there was a small case which I brought to him ; he bade me put it under his pillow and thanked me, and so I kissed his hand again and returned here.'

CHAPTER V

ANN stood by the window, not the high window from which she had looked forth so long ago ; she could not see the tall ships or the Northern hills from Glenample House, only a snow-bound garden stretching down to the black water whose surface already showed the hazy glint of frost. No, there were no more tall ships for her, she thought in sudden bitter remembrance. What a child she had been that day long ago, the first day on which Simon had become to her not just the lost dream child of Kells but a living person whom she might some day know for herself. She laid her forehead wearily against the glass, hardly aware of its icy touch for the tears burning behind her closed eyelids. Why had this happened ? Oh, why ? She had been so happy to see him again, to feel he was still her friend. He would never, she felt sure, have willingly insulted her husband ; how, then, had it come about and what would happen now ?

She had not seen Glenample again that day and at night had feigned sleep, which was indeed far from her, until his own loud breathing had told her she need pretend no longer but might slip from the great bed and sit gazing heavy-eyed into the red glow of the fire.

She had feared they would fight, but in her knowledge duels took place in the early hours, and my lord had slept late and risen sulky but sobered. He had, indeed, offered her a half-repentant apology. " I think it is to Mr Kelston you should apologise," she had answered coldly. He glared at that and muttered something below his breath. She caught the word 'pay.' "Are you going to challenge a one-handed man ?" she asked him. And at that he answered

hotly, "One-handed! He was the finest swordsman in London; a man must be no coward to challenge Mr Kelston, my lady." She looked at him scornfully but did not speak, and Glenample growing angry blustered again. "If he killed me you would perhaps be glad enough?" "He will not kill you," Ann had said coldly and had turned away while he stood looking after her, annoyed with himself, more than furious with Kelston.

Would they fight? She had been terribly afraid all morning, but my lord had stayed quietly within doors until eleven o'clock when he had gone to Parliament House.

Now it was near on two, the hour at which it was their custom to dine. She turned away from the window and stood looking round the pretty room. Mistress Howard and the rest would call her a fortunate woman, she supposed, and perhaps wonder, as she herself had often wondered, why he had chosen her, a plain-looking penniless lass, when he had so many of higher station and greater beauty to choose from. My lord was kind to her—almost always, only sometimes when he was drunk she was a little afraid of him. He had been very kind to her when her baby was born, born dead, so that she had never had the joy of holding him to her breast, her little son. My lord might have been angry for he greatly desired an heir; but instead, he had been gentle. She had been grateful to him for that. He was generous too, he grudged her nothing, neither for herself (though indeed she wanted little) nor her family. Her mother admired him greatly, her mother had indeed more than once reproved her coldness. Ah! but how could her mother understand? How often she had heard her talk of her own marriage, of her own and her husband's love for each other—how could she know what it meant when there was no love? Her mother had said it would come; Ann shivered, turning her thoughts quickly from the sick despair of her marriage night. Oh, she was wicked, a wicked, cold-hearted woman; perhaps that was why she was being punished now?

But she had asked for Simon only as a friend, had been so glad, and proud, and thankful that she could meet him as that, could love him, as he had always so obviously loved her, without a thought of passion to soil their friendship ; then so suddenly, so senselessly to have him thrust from her, it was cruel, cruel. Ann's hands clenched themselves at her sides and her white teeth bit into her lip as she struggled to keep back a storm of tears, and at that instant she heard her husband's voice talking to some one as he crossed the hall and knew that in another moment he would come in. But when he did enter his wife's back was to the light and her head held high, and her welcome to Captain Scott whom he had brought with him was as gracious and kind as any young man could desire. They had met in Parliament House and so my lord had brought his cousin to dinner, a kindlier welcome than he had given to her cousin, thought Ann bitterly but showed no trace of her thought.

They dined at a small table by the fire, for the cold was intense, and it was already so dark that the candles were lighted. My lord kept an excellent table and his wines were superb ; the Countess made a delightful hostess and to-day she seemed to be particular gay and pleasant ; yet as cover followed cover, the candle-light glinting on the gold plate and the polished oak of the table, it became evident that all was not well. My lady, for all her vivacity, merely played with her food and my lord did little better, he had a way too of lapsing into sudden silence as if he were listening, which was uncommon disconcerting, and when the servants had gone silence fell on all of them for a few moments.

"That fellow Mitchell was before the Privy Council to-day," said Captain Scott, making a new effort.

"Aye, he has confessed, they say, on promise of his life," said the Earl.

"What will they do to him then ?" the Countess asked carelessly.

"Chop off his right hand and send him to the Bass."

It was as if a pistol had gone off in their midst,

for my lord had no sooner said the thing than his eyes sought his cousin with a curious fearful look. My lady drew a quick breath and, for an instant that seemed an eternity no one spoke. Then, "How horrible!" said she with a little high-pitched laugh, and Captain Scott plunged into a story about the Archbishop, a gossipy, bawdy tale; but he could think of nothing else and as nobody was listening, not even himself, it mattered little. Then her ladyship said, breaking into his story without ceremony: "Did you say the sentence had actually been put in force, my lord?"

"Good heavens, no." The Earl gazed at her startled by something in her voice; she had risen, one hand clasping the back of her chair, her face colourless save for the rouge on her cheeks.

"Then at whose execution have you been to-day?" she asked, and the others, following the direction of her pointing finger and fixed stony gaze, turned their eyes also on to the dark clotted patch on my lord's wrist frill.

Captain Scott swallowed audibly and my lord swore.

"Do not lie," she said fiercely as they groped for some excuse, too taken aback to be fluent, "do not lie. You have fought him, what has happened?" and as they both continued to sit looking stupidly at her, "Oh, my God! he is not dead?" she cried, and her hands clutched the table's edge and her body bent as if some agony had seized her.

"No, no," cried Scott recovering hastily, "nothing very serious has happened. There was an accident, but——"

"Accident!" she cried scornfully. "You murder a one-handed man and call it 'accident'."

"But he is not murdered, the doctors have every hope that he will recover, you must believe me, my lady," the young man pleaded earnestly, for the Earl sat dumb. "He may be one-handed but on my honour the advantage was all his," he went on gravely. "It was my lord's foot slipped and he was flung for-

ward ; Mr —— the other—his sword would have been through my lord's heart had he not with uncommon presence of mind and—and generosity—dropped his point ; it let my lord's sword over his guard and unfortunately before he could prevent it had wounded him, my lord's weight driving it before he could recover his balance. It was not my lord's fault."

"Generosity," she repeated in a low voice ; "yes, he was always generous."

"He is her cousin," muttered my lord, speaking for the first time, and again she took him up with a sort of cold fury.

"Oh yes, he is my cousin—not my lover, Captain Scott, do not be under any misapprehension—he is my cousin whom I have not seen for three years, and so when he comes, as in common courtesy he is bound, to pay his respects upon my marriage, my husband comes in drunk—oh yes, my lord, you think because you can stand upon your feet and do not hiccup like his Grace of Rothes that I do not know when you are drunk—and insults him without cause, and then because he is—generous——" (her voice dropped suddenly on the word as if she loved it) "my lord, who is neither generous nor it would seem very skilful, does his best to kill him. Oh, I am a proud woman, gentlemen," and on that her voice broke and dragging herself from the table she was gone.

There was silence, a curious benumbed stillness. Then, "There is a damned high-tempered little —— for you," said my lord coarsely, but not without a touch of admiration in his anger. "Fill your glass, Francis, and pass the bottle."

"But you cannot go out in this snow, my lady, or at least let me get your chair, the back way is not safe."

"Oh, Grizzie, stop talking and fetch me your dark cloak and remember what I told you ; I am lying down and I can see no one. Tell me when all is quiet and I will slip out."

"But, my lady——"

"Enough, Grizzel."

Grizzie shrugged her shoulders and went to fetch the cloak ; this white-faced, haughty lady was new to her, nevertheless she was troubled.

“ May I not come with you at least ? ”

The Countess stamped an impatient foot. “ Would seem your fall has broken your wits as well as your arm, girl. Let be,” she said and fastened the cloak about her.

At the foot of the garden a door led into a pathway by the water’s edge, if she followed it she could return to the High Street by a close lower down. Hurrying along in the blinding snow, her cloak drawn about her, Ann had no thought for cold or wet, only she must know for herself what had happened to him. The lane was lonely but she had no fear, when a hand fell on her shoulder turning her about as if she had been a child. A tall haggard old woman was looking down at her.

“ What do you want ? ” said Ann. “ How dare you stop me like this ? ”

The woman shook her head. “ I cannot hear you,” she said, “ I took you for another.” Then as Ann would have turned from her, “ You are looking for news,” she went on, speaking in the strange mechanical tones of the very deaf. “ News,” she repeated and her glittering mysterious eyes held the girl spell-bound. “ Listen ! I see the crossing of swords and the shedding of blood—blood, blood—The blood of the saints and the blood of fools, but the end is not yet, and in the end—peace.” Her voice which had risen in a toneless chant sank again on the word ; then, as if she saw the girl before her for the first time, “ A piece of silver for a poor old woman’s bread,” she whined and held out a clawlike hand. Ann trembling and shaken, sought in the pocket of the cloak and was glad to find a coin, drawing it out she saw it was but a bodle. “ That is all that I have,” she said, forgetful that the weird creature could not hear her, and thrusting it into the outstretched hand she turned, the spell broken, and fled upon her way.

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Simon lay very still after Reuben had left him ; the wound in his side throbbed and burned and he felt extraordinarily tired, but his mind was clear enough. There might be mischief over this business unless he could prevent it. If it could have been kept quiet—but there were too many people in it he feared ; the chirurgeon or a servant was sure to talk, and Lauderdale's spies, her Grace's at any rate, were everywhere. Her Grace would be glad enough to have this handle against Glenample. Simon was quite aware that he could land the Earl in the Castle to-morrow, but it never occurred to him as a possible revenge ; he had, in fact, no grudge whatever against the Earl, he should have kept his own head and jumped back but there had been no time for thought. Still, if he swore now that the thing had been play, a wager, and a button off a foil, they could not do anything. Of course if he died—but he had no intention of dying so need not worry about that, only to-morrow he must get Cuthbert to warn Glenample, to-morrow was soon enough, he was too tired just now. Lord ! he was tired—he must be dreaming, for he distinctly heard Reuben's voice saying, " But, my lady, how did you come ? " and then Cuthbert's startled exclamation, " Ann ! " But he was not asleep and that really was Cuthbert's voice. Good heavens ! the child could not really be there ? " Ann," he cried, and tried to sit up, only to fall back again with a groan ; then opening his eyes he saw her. " My dear," he said, " my dear, you should not have come. Glenample——"

" Never heed Glenample, dear," she said quietly. " I just had to come. Are they caring for you properly ? " And then over her shoulder, " Do not look so scared, Mr Halket, I will answer to Davie for this."

In spite of pain and some anxiety Simon laughed. " You will do that right enough, I doubt not," he said. She had taken off her wet cloak, and with her rumpled curls and face flushed with excitement and the icy wind she was a child again, the Ann of the apple tree.

"I had no thought to trouble you, dear," she said, "only I had to know for myself. Simon, what have they done to you?"

"Nothing," he said. "I ran myself on to my lord's sword, a foolish business; he was in no way to blame, we did not know the button was off the foil. Dr Burnet (Glenample sent him) will soon patch me up."

She stood looking down at him with a little tender smile. "Oh, my dear, what a liar you are! But I should not make you talk. I am glad you have Tom Burnet, he has some sense." She bent, moved his pillow to a more comfortable angle, and kissed his forehead lightly. "I will get the truth from Gourlay or Sir Cuthbert," she said, nodding at him, "for now you must sleep."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT Kelston had feared happened. The news of the duel leaked out and the Duchess of Lauderdale at once sent her good brother Halton to make enquiries; but Halton was a man for whom Simon, in common with most other people, had a hearty dislike, for Charles Maitland possessed, it seemed, all his brother's faults and none of his virtues. It was clear both he and the Duchess had an eye on Glenample's revenues; but they got no help from Simon. Then the Commissioner sent for Cuthbert and by bullying and blustering tried to frighten the story out of him. Cuthbert, however, had been well primed, and with his air of youthful innocence almost succeeded in convincing the Duke. "Though why, unless they both be applicants for Bedlam, they chose Leith Links in a snow-storm, God knows," his Grace grumbled. In answer to which Cuthbert modestly explained that he also knew, it being indeed part of the wager; but, he hastened to add, the whole had been, he agreed with the Duke, a ridiculous affair.

"A man with one hand," snapped Lauderdale, "should certainly find better employment for it."

Tell Mr Kelston he deserves all he has got and that, for my part, I have a good mind to clap them both into the Tolbooth to cool their heels." And he might at the Duchess's bidding have carried out his threat had not letters from London, in which the King wrote that he would never cease to be his Commissioner's friend, put him into an excellent humour, the discomfiture of Hamilton making Glenample's down-setting unnecessary. So that when a few weeks later Simon, having already written by Halket a submissive apology, presented himself in person his Grace was ready to let bygones be bygones and receive him as cordially as ever. Not so her Grace, who treated Mr Kelston with a marked coldness, not being a woman to forget an injury, real or imagined. It was all very well for Mr Kelston to fight a man she disliked, that had delighted her—but to stand between her and her intended victim so that he could in no wise be brought to punishment was an offence of which she made a mental note that it should not go unpunished.

But Kelston, though for the sake of his Galloway friends he was sorry to have offended the Duchess, had no idea of the depth of his offence and so went his way unconcerned, the more so that the Commissioner in a moment of expansion had told him he intended to pacify the country with 'An Act of Grace.'

Kelston was thinking of this as he walked up the Canongate a few days later; he might now, he thought, return home, for he was getting very tired of hanging about Holyrood and the reports of damage done in the country by the weather's undue severity made him anxious to get back to his estate. At the moment he proposed visiting Sir George Mackenzie at his house in the Abbot of Melrose Close anent certain legal business connected with the same. But on passing through the Nether Bow Port he found the High Street blocked by a crowd of idlers enjoying the not unusual spectacle of a poor wretch at the cart's tail, and having no desire to witness the exhibition, the less so that a glance told him the victim was a woman,

Simon was about to turn into a shop by the Port when David plucked at his sleeve.

"Kells, div ye ken who's tied to yon cart's tail?" he asked in much agitation; and as Simon looked at him astonished, "it is Marion Grier, her you'll mind, at Dumfries."

"Impossible," said his master. The cart had turned and the woman, her punishment over, was being none too gently unfastened and, as she would have sunk from pain and exhaustion, was lifted into the cart for the return journey to prison.

"Nothing is impossible in these awesome evil times," said David Gourlay solemnly, and repeated "yon is Marion sure enough." Simon forced himself to look; the woman sat limply in the cart, a sack about her bleeding shoulders, her face ghastly and her eyes glazed, and with a feeling of nausea he realised that David had spoken the truth. A boy had just raised a lump of dirty frozen snow to fling at her when Kelston caught him by the collar and, shaking him so that he howled in terror, dropped him back into the gutter.

"Here! Yon's my boy," said a burly fishwife.

"Boy? I thought he was a rat," retorted Kelston, and the crowd laughed and seeing he was a gentleman, and big at that, made way to let him pass. He did not go to Rosehaugh's now but to Mr Lauder of Fountainhall whose father-in-law had been provost for ten years and was now a Lord of Session and would, he thought, procure him a permit for the Tolbooth. It took him some time to get, but an hour later, on presenting it to the Good Man of the Tolbooth he was in due course passed on to a turnkey who led him up a narrow winding stair and ushered him into a large room on the second flat of the old prison where, among a crowd of prisoners of both sexes, he found the woman he sought.

She sat huddled on a rough pallet and at first, remembering the staid, elderly woman who for all her poverty had kept her house and herself so neat and spotless, he had hesitated, wondering again if it were not after all a mistake, the more so that from

the Good Man he had learnt that her offence was rioting and brutal behaviour towards the parson of her parish. But in the next moment he noted with a quick realisation of its pathos that, even now in her degradation, the shawl about her poor torn shoulders was decently pinned and her grey hair pushed back into her snood in some sort of order.

“Do you remember me, Mistress Grier?” he asked. She looked up at him and a dull flush rose in her haggard cheeks. “Aye, Kells, I saw you down there in yon awful street.” She shuddered, covering her face with her hands. Another prisoner brought a low stool and he sat down beside her, and by degrees as her composure returned he learnt her story.

“It was when the new curate came to Kilwham,” she said. “Kilwham, kindly God-fearing man, had given us a cottage when we were turned out two years syne by our own landlord in Dumfries for not conforming. The auld curate was a cannie body, real ta’en up about his books and caring little who attended on his ministrations and who did not, so we could live there in peace till he died at the turn of the year. The people had hoped they might get back their own minister then but the Bishop put in one of his, and the disappointed folk barred him out of the kirk and that put him against us a’ for a start. I was not at the rioting for my mother was ill at the time, it has been an awfu’ hard winter for auld folk, but he cam to our cottage the following week and demanded why we had not been to the kirk. My mother showed him her poor knees and that she could not walk, but he pretended not to believe her, and indeed it was but weakness on her part, poor soul, she being old and frail, to offer such an excuse, for had she had all her powers she would have gone none the oftener, but she thought to save me. He was a little thin man but he carried on, using such threats and frightening the poor auld body till she grat and I could bear it no longer, so I e’en took him by the shoulders and showed him the door. I had no thought to hurt the creature, but I was weary with him and angry to

have her troubled, and at the door I will own that I lifted a besom and told him to be gone; and he, turning to curse me, saw not where he was going and tripping fell on the edge of an old ploughshare (for the place had once been a forge) and cut his head, and the next day he came back with the soldiers and carried me away."

Simon left her what money he had and promised to do all he could, and especially to find out what had happened to the poor bed-ridden old woman whose only stay had been thus rudely torn from her.

He would have gone straight to Lauderdale but the Commissioner was away visiting his new house at Thirlestane, so that night Halket had to write to an even more exalted personage than James, Duke of York.

'May it please Your Majesty,

I have forbourned until this present to intrude upon the silence you have seen fit to continue toward me, nor would I now break it to ask you any favour other than one which, from my knowledge of Your Majesty, I believe you will readily grant—pardon for a woman. Her offence is that she removed a babbling curate from her house and placed him without ceremony in a snow heap which to his misfortune, and hers, contained something hard enough to crack his pate; for this she has already suffered at the cart's tail and is further sentenced to the Barbadoes. She hath an aged mother who cannot well survive losing her care, the punishment is like, therefore, to involve two deaths, surely excessive for a curate's cracked skull, seeing he is in no wise made remarkable thereby? Pardon her, Sire, which is Your Majesty's Royal Prerogative. She is old and plain and what is here called a fanatic, even so, she is a woman, and having nursed your humble servant when he was thought to be dying, he would fain (at Your Majesty's expense!) pay his debt and remain as ever

Your Majesty's very grateful humble
and obedient servant,

SIMON KELSTON.'

This letter, duly addressed, was enclosed in a second which ran as follows :

‘My deare Nelly,

Will you give the enclosed to Charles at the first favourable opportunity and *see that he answers it before he forgets*, thereby adding to the manifold debt I owe to your kindness.

Your obliged and true friend

S. K.’

He wrote also to Will Morrison bidding him ride to Kilwham and get news of the old woman there and if possible have her brought to Euphan’s care at Kells.

“It is a strange business,” he said to Cuthbert as the two dined together a day or two later. “I saw the poor creature again to-day ; she has recovered all her old calm. ‘The Lord’ is being very good to her. There are, it seems, a number of fanatical folk mixed up with the scum in that place, and she has not heard so much ‘solid and soul-satisfying preaching’ for many years ; and, when I told her I was doing what I could for her mother I lifted, I believe, the only real load from her mind. I own to you, Cuthbert, I was half envious of her extraordinary peace.”

They had hardly finished dinner when Captain Telfer was announced. He stood in the doorway looking solemn and put about, and in answer to Kelston’s demand if he were fed murmured only a hurried, “Yes, yes.”

“Well, a glass of wine anyway—come in, man, do not stand there looking like an owl. What is the matter ? ”

“I am afraid something rather serious, Mr Kelston. I am more than distressed that it should be I who have this unpleasant business to perform, and yet better I than an enemy.”

“Lord ! am I to have my head off ? ” Simon rose lazily and came forward smiling as Telfer held out a letter ; but his face sobered as he read it and turning it looked at the seal. “I need not ask if you have a

warrant, Captain Telfer," he said quietly. "At least I presume this is not some huge practical joke? But what does it mean? Of what am I accused?"

He handed the communication to Cuthbert who read with equal astonishment, for the paper, signed by Halton as the Commissioner's deputy, ordered Mr Simon Kelston of Kells in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright to present himself a prisoner at the gate of His Majesty's Castle of Edinburgh at or before 5 o'clock that afternoon.

"Is it that blasted duel?" asked Sir Cuthbert, but Simon shook his head. "No, the Commissioner could not go back on that now." He had taken the warrant from Telfer and was reading it with raised brows. "'Leasing making'? Well, I am a bit of a liar but——" He was really at sea and Telfer could not help him.

"What about the fanatic woman you have been helping?" suggested Cuthbert.

"But I have done nothing. His Grace was away so I wrote straight to the King through Nelly, but even if he were likely to resent that, and I do not for a moment believe he will, he has not yet had time to receive it."

"Receive it? He never will," cried Telfer aghast. "Heavens! Mr Kelston, you do not know our Scotland. Pray God there was in it no criticism of the Council?" He had been troubled before, now he was frightened. Argyle had been sentenced to death on a less offence some years before, and only the King's pardon had saved him. Telfer did not say this, but his terror was not reassuring. Simon laughed but not very mirthfully. "You are a comforting companion for an arrested man," he said with a shrug, "but I said nothing anyone could construe into treason. I did not even ask for a mitigation of the sentence, but for a free pardon, in no way justifying the offence."

"It is the Duchess of course," said Telfer still gloomy, but Simon had recovered.

"Well, there is no use worrying as to causes just

now," he said with a shrug ; " the warrant is there and must be obeyed. I have still an hour or so and must arrange my household, if I may ? "

" Why, certainly," said Telfer, " only I'm afraid I must ask for that," he added shamefacedly. Simon unbuckled his sword and handed it to him. Telfer laid it on the table and held out his hand. " You know I would much rather have given you mine, sir," he said, and there was real feeling in his voice.

CHAPTER VII

KELSTON'S imprisonment in the Castle of Edinburgh was in many ways less irksome than the word seems to imply ; during daylight he was free within the walls of the fortress to go where he pleased ; he could have his servant, what books he desired, and even receive visitors. There were, moreover, several gentlemen undergoing a like imprisonment, so that he did not lack society. From his fellow prisoners Kelston learned something of the intolerable misgovernment under which his country groaned. These gentlemen were no fanatics, nor had any of them been of an age to sign the abhorred Covenant, as so many of their persecutors had done. They were loyal subjects who had rejoiced in the King's return ; but they were all men who by upbringing and conviction were Presbyterian, and they had not unnaturally resented the broken promises by which their Church had been disestablished and the arbitrary way in which its ministers had been harried and driven out for not conforming to Episcopacy. Yet they had not resented these things by any act of disloyalty or rebellion except in so far as to abstain from attending upon the ministrations of men they honestly believed to be perjured. It was for this fault alone that most of them were now suffering, it being common to fine such as would not attend the Episcopal incumbents at the rate of an eighth of their yearly rent for each such non-attendance. And as one prisoner explained

to Kelston this had, in his case, already mounted to a debt of over thirty-one thousand pounds which, his yearly rental being sixteen hundred, made his chance of liberty small indeed.

Another, a nobleman, had come to Edinburgh upon business, and during his absence his house had been set upon and his son's tutor arrested. The country folk, indignant at the treatment of their lady, who was in delicate health, had risen in her defence and rescued the tutor, who thereupon had made good his escape; but my lord, though absent during the whole affair, had been peremptorily ordered to the Castle, there to await his Majesty's pleasure until he could produce the tutor of whose present whereabouts he had no idea. But perhaps the hardest case was that of the Laird of Rosedean who had rescued an indulged minister from the hands of a ruffian whom both took to be a common robber but who, later, proved to be a spy of the Archbishop. A warrant had been produced at the trial, and though this had not been shown to Rosedean at the time of the rescue it was taken as evidence of his defiance of law and the case given against him. Simon listened and said little; what struck him about these men was their lack of animosity in speaking of their persecutors and a patience which gave dignity to their suffering. There was, too, about Rosedean in particular, the same quiet strength which he had long ago noted in Mr Cant and no less in Will Morrison, a something independent of rank or breeding, a something too he felt thinking of it now, not bound by one or other of the Churches, for had he not seen this same quietude in the face of William Penn the Quaker, and, not once or twice, among humble Catholic folk he had known in Belgium and France. Christ? Was He again the secret? Had it been this strength, this peace, which had given to his Princess these 'sentiments' so admired by Feuillet? Seemed the thought of Him was not to be avoided; but as yet it remained a vague thought hiding rather than clothing the Figure about Whom it draped itself.

Simon would like to have questioned Rosedean, but an uncertainty as to what he really desired to know held him back, as well as a certain discomfort born of finding himself accepted by his fellow prisoners as one of themselves, whereas, he knew himself to be in no sense a sufferer for a cause but merely the victim of a greedy woman's spite.

Edinburgh Castle stands on a rocky eminence which falls steeply away on three sides to a depth of more than two hundred feet ; and at this time was on the fourth side separated by a small ravine from an open space bordering on the town, upon which in fine weather holiday-making citizens took their walks, exchanging gossip and showing off their finery under the very guns of the fortress and in view of its unfortunate captives. These indeed could watch if they might not share much of the life of the town, and on a clear day there was spread before them a magnificent panorama of sea and hill ; from North Berwick Law and the islands of the Forth to the rounded breasts of Fife across the water, and from the ridge of Corstorphine Hill in the west to the great blue Bens of the Highlands. While, as they looked south, across the Borough Muir and Loch, beyond the gentle slopes of Blackford and the Braids, rose the bold outline of the Pentland range, where, as David was never tired of reminding his master, so many of his own poor country folk had suffered and died.

"Rebellion," Simon answered him ; but David, well read in 'Naphtali,'¹ shook his head, and Simon did not press a point in which he was in truth coming less and less to believe. He was standing on a rock platform looking out over this scene one fine spring morning, some three weeks after his arrest, when he heard his name and turning found to his surprise and pleasure Lord and Lady Glenample.

"It was with great distress," began my lord, the first greeting over, "that we heard on our return

¹ "Naphtali, or the Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ"—a much read statement of the Presbyterian case published in 1667 and condemned by the Government.

from Glenample of your—ah—misfortune, and I cannot but fear that it is owing to your generous conduct towards myself.”

“I know of no conduct on my part which deserves so handsome a name, my lord,” Kelston answered heartily. “Certain, even if any did you are nobly repaying it by your present courtesy. As to the reason of my arrest I can tell you very little.” He related the circumstances and Telfer’s surmise, and Ann cried out hotly, “Things have come to a pretty pass if the King’s Shadow may not write to his master without my Lord Halton’s interference.”

“Four years, my cousin. Certes, the King must be accustomed to being a shadowless ghost by now,” Simon answered her lightly but for a moment a wistful look came into his dark eyes; that had been Nelly’s name, he remembered, and the Court had played with it.

“Nevertheless, my lady is right,” said the Earl. “Things have come to a pass in this country when a man may not lay his lawful complaints before his sovereign; but I still fear it was your refusal to act against me with her Grace which is at the bottom of this unfortunate business, and if I can do anything—I have already spoken to his Grace of Hamilton—you must command me.”

“Do you live in great discomfort, Simon? Is David here? And, oh, do they give you enough to eat?” Tales of starving captives passed through Ann’s mind and he did look thin she thought with a pang of anxiety. Both men laughed, and Simon explained that he could order what he chose, adding that the governor treated him with the greatest courtesy, a fact which was at that moment corroborated by that gentleman himself, who sent a soldier to offer Mr Kelston his own apartment in which to entertain his guests. They had been to Glenample to visit her mother, Ann explained, and it was thus they had not sooner heard of his arrest; it was Cuthbert, still lingering in Edinburgh, who had told her. Simon made light of his imprisonment and she went

away comforted, and Glenample with many promises ; though he admitted that while Halton held the reins for her Grace he had little power.

But little though he had made of it to Ann, and easy though it might be in the daytime, when at sundown the door of his cell closed upon him imprisonment became no light matter to Kelston ; for within the four walls of his vaulted dungeon were enclosed with the closing doors dreams and memories which of all others it had been his effort to forget. The turning key, which shut him off from human intercourse, brought home to him, not only his present loss of liberty, but reawakened, by the very familiarity of the sound, the vivid recollection of his former imprisonment and the poignant despair of his double loss.

At Kells Anne, his Princess, had seldom seemed far away ; here Madame of France lay within her marble tomb, cut off from him for ever. At Kells, to be one-handed meant only a difficulty to be overcome, a disablement outbalanced by the pleasure of accomplishment ; here the Bastille in all its horror closed upon him once again, he was helpless, mutilated, a cripple for life. . . . He was not yet entirely recovered from his recent wound though his natural health and strength had stood him in such good stead, and in the night, when fatigue or pain kept him sleepless, these old ghosts were hard to face ; but with the first faint streak of dawn, bringing promise of freedom and a new day, came also a return of that dogged endurance which had carried him through so much in the past. As the days went by and strength returned the ghosts became less powerful and no one guessed the agony of those memory-haunted nights ; only Gourlay, when he shaved his master, noticed that the grey was increasing in his black hair.

But on the night of Glenample's visit a new ghost rose to haunt Simon's thoughts. 'The King's Shadow ?' In the Bastille he had at least been in a foreign prison ; to-night the door was locked by his own countryman in his own capital city and by the

order of men who ruled in the name of that King whose shadow (he thought with a shade of bitterness) he had been so completely that he had seldom troubled to think out State matters for himself. No man had kept himself more free from political intrigue, no man had served the King with more whole-hearted loyalty, but that had not saved him from this humiliation any more than it had saved him from exile. What had he done, his soul cried out in sudden revolt against fate, to deserve these constant blows of fortune? This imprisonment was preposterous, and Charles—Charles, who had been not only his King but his familiar friend—had he utterly forgotten his existence? Ah, well, Charles was at least blameless for this, he told himself, catching in his desolation at this straw of belief in the King. He had been standing, his gaze fixed upon the door; now he turned and drawing his stool to the table sat down. His Bible lay near his hand, placed there as ever by David before he left for the night. Simon took it up, glad of anything that would keep his mind off this new aching loneliness. It had opened at St Mark's Gospel; it was long he thought since he had read the Gospels, and turning to the beginning he began to read them now. How long he read he did not know, but at last the candle guttered and went out, burnt to its socket; he had not another but he sat on, staring into the darkness, his thoughts far away within that Roman Judgment Hall where that other Man had stood in patient majesty, deserted of friend and follower. 'Prophet, Priest, and King.' The words took on new meaning. King? Simon had boasted even now that he had not offended against his King and his conscience bore him out in that; but though he had not offended against his earthly King, had he not offended most certainly and most often against this King of Kings? this King who stood in the purple robes that just such indifferent fellows as he had placed about His shoulders when they crowned Him with a crown of thorns?

"And they smote Him on the head with a reed and did

spit upon Him, and when they had mocked Him they took off the purple robe."

Had not he, Simon, stood by at many such a scene ? Not participating, perhaps, but certain not protesting.

Yet this King, whom by his indifference and heedlessness he had crucified, had not cursed him from His cross ; nay rather His hands had been ever stretched out to bless even to the softening of the severity of others. For when Charles had let his servant go, it had been to a land which he himself had hated, yet to Simon it had been made to be, not exile, but home. Even now in this solitary cell the Word of God came to Kelston not with terror but with a sweetness that brought him at last to his knees. He was glad to remember that it was a man of his own name who had been chosen to carry the Lord's cross, and he prayed, perhaps the first real prayer of his life, that some day he too might be thought worthy to share in its weight.

At the end of April, when he had begun to think he was to be left to end his days without trial, he was taken down to the Abbey under guard and brought before a select committee of the Council. A carefully selected quartette, he thought, looking round the unfriendly faces : Halton, the Archbishop of St Andrews, Rothés, and Atholl, with Nisbet, the King's Advocate, and Patterson, Bishop of his own diocese of Galloway, as its extra members. Mr Kelston's indictment, as stated by the King's Advocate, was a cleverly arranged tissue of lies with just a thread of truth to keep it from falling at once about the ears of its author.

Mr Kelston was said (the Commissioner being absent) to have written to his Majesty, complaining of the administration of justice by his Majesty's Government—a clear case of leasing-making and the more condemnable that the letter had been sent under cover of another. To Simon's protest that a pardon only had been asked, the very word implying that no defence of the prisoner was made or censure

of the sentence intended, Halton replied sharply, that on the contrary the sentence had been clearly stated to be excessive and the justice of the court thereby impugned.

"Mr Kelston," began the Advocate, "you were in the King's service?"

"I have that honour."

"When were you dismissed?"

Simon's head went up with a characteristic movement. "I have never to my knowledge been dismissed."

"Yet you have not been to Court for some years. How many, Mr Kelston?"

"Four, my lord."

"Humph, that speaks for itself," sneered the Advocate and the others nodded.

"You are a Presbyterian, Mr Kelston," said the Archbishop looking at the man before him with half-closed eyes, "and attend, I understand, the ministrations of an indulged, though, I fear, none too grateful minister. Have you ever attended a conventicle?" He shot out the last question with evident intent to entrap; but Simon returned his look blandly. "Not yet, your Grace, but should I desire to do so, I have his Majesty's permit to worship where and when I choose." He watched the effect of this statement upon the bishops with some amusement. Mr Cant, for all his gentleness, had spoken with severity of this permit considering it a highly Erastian document; but the Archbishop bowed reverentially to Charles's hastily written scrawl.

The interview dragged on. Simon had demanded that his letter be read but this had been disallowed until Rothés suddenly desired it should be produced, when it was forthwith handed round. The bishops were scandalised at its flippancy, but Rothés hid a smile behind his hand and Atholl laughed outright. Both knew the charge to be ridiculous and were a little ashamed of their part in it, but feared the Duchess.

Nisbet hinted at a fine and Rothés nodded, but

Simon told them plainly that though they could easily enough ruin him he doubted if anyone would be the gainer, seeing his rents amounted to a bare £1300 Scots.

“My lords,” exclaimed Nisbet angrily, “you have here an example of the way in which accused persons endeavour to escape just punishment. You are aware that Mr Kelston was for many years a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, drawing a yearly sum of £1000 sterling.” His tongue rolled on the word as if the very sound gave him pleasure. “Now I have reason to believe that this income was seldom spent; where then is this money?”

Six pairs of eyes fixed themselves upon Simon, but he smiled back at them with, for a moment, the old impish amusement with which Charles had been familiar.

“It was paid into the Exchequer, my lords, and, as I doubt not you are aware, the King has been pleased to honour us by its stoppage; when it becomes convenient for his Majesty to repay that loan my Lord Halton is most welcome to what is left.”

Again Rothes and Atholl exchanged smiles. The ‘Stop of the Exchequer’ three years before was a highly illegal proceeding which had ruined many small proprietors and seriously crippled others; Halton bit his nails and Nisbet talked no more of fines.

Finally Simon was remanded to prison to await his formal trial; only, having seriously annoyed Halton and shocked the bishops, he was much more closely confined. But now the ghosts had gone, and in spite of a growing home-sickness for a sight of the Rhinns of Kells Simon was fain to own that once more the severity of men was being tempered for him.

Sir George Mackenzie, who had been among his former visitors, had offered to defend him; but before the trial could come to the courts the advocates had themselves become embroiled with the Government and retired to Linlithgow, so that it seemed likely the prisoners might have to spend a considerable time on their rocky eminence.

CHAPTER VIII

It was about a week after Simon had been before the Council that Lady Glenample stood by the table at which her lord was seated, frowning at her with some perplexity. She was talking very quietly but with just that gentle tone of determination that his lordship was beginning to know.

"You see, my lord, matters are really worse than ever for he is no longer even permitted visitors, and Sir Cuthbert says the cells at the Castle are little better than dungeons, and he cannot be quite strong yet after so severe a wound."

"Well, my lady, what would you? I have done my best; I have even petitioned the Chancellor for permission to go to London to see his Grace myself, but was refused."

"To London!" Ann regarded her husband with a reflective expression which had in it no thoughts of him. "To his Grace," she repeated. "Of course, how clever of you to think of that, my lord." She smiled at him as one might smile at a good child and went on, still reflectively. "If only one might see Duke Lauderdale for a few moments it should be easy, for I do not believe his Grace knows anything of this; the whole case is ridiculous and his Grace is fond of Mr Kelston; it is only that the Duchess is angry with him for your sake."

The Earl wriggled uncomfortably under that; she was, he thought, extraordinarily insistent on the fault being his.

"I shall go to London," announced her little ladyship.

My lord, when he had regained sufficient breath to do so, swore long and deeply. Was the girl mad, he demanded of Heaven, or only demented? Then working himself to a passion, what was the secret between her and this man Kelston? he would know the truth. Did she know that in the first week of her

marriage she had twice wakened him by calling this fellow's name? She looked at him quickly at that but showed no sign of shame. Instead, "That is possible," said she; "Mr Kelston had helped me twice at least when I was in trouble, and—you were a stranger to me, my lord." She smiled at him again, a little shyly this time. "I was frightened, and a little unhappy, home-sick, I suppose."

"Is he your lover?" he demanded.

Her eyes clear and truthful did not leave his face. "You know he is not, my lord."

"But he loves you?"

She shook her head. "No, he has never loved me; though I think he has always been fond of me, as he might of some young sister."

"And you?"

Still her eyes did not waver, though she paused before answering, as if she weighed his question.

"Yes, I loved him," she owned at last. "I was very young when I went to Court and he was different from all the rest; he is brave and good and honourable, I am not ashamed of loving him; but you need not be distressed, my lord, it is—it is not that kind of love. That is why I am not afraid to tell you; indeed I am glad you have asked me, because now you will see why it is I must save my friend."

My Lord Glenample sat staring at his wife, blank amazement holding him silent. He had never heard anything like this in his life, and not the least amazing part of it was that looking into those innocent eyes he knew she spoke truth. Still that she must needs go to London; that was more than flesh and blood could be expected to admit.

"I cannot permit you to go," he muttered, but to that she nodded ready agreement.

"No, I expect you are right; it would not do for any one to think you had sent me. No, I shall go to Glenample and from there I can write to you that my dear friend Mistress Blagge is going abroad (she is, you know) and that I must see her before she goes. That is a capital idea, is it not? I shall take Grizzie

with me, and Andrew Gilmour has been so often with you that he knows all the best roads and inns, and so I shall be quite safe."

She came round the table and laid a hand on his knee.

"My lord, you are very good to me; do not think that I do not appreciate your kindness." She bent and offered him her cool young cheek and my lord, hardly knowing what he did, kissed her. Then before he had time to protest further, "I think it was wonderful of you to think of London," she said, and he heard her singing softly to herself as she tripped upstairs.

He was due at the Chancellor's. He would be firmer when he came home, he told himself; but there was much to discuss at the Chancellor's and when he did come home my lord was in no state to be firm, and his gentleman put him to bed without question. And next morning when he enquired for her ladyship he was reminded by an astonished servant that she had left yesterday for Glenample.

"Eh?" roared the Earl, and then, "Oh, ah, of course," said he, and shut his study door with a bang.

"June 1st (or as they call it in this benighted country, May the 21st) 1674 at The Angel, Grantham.

Never have I thought to have such adventures or to see so many strange towns, far less that great and terrible Babylon from which I have these three days since escaped. Let me set it down from the beginning. Some days after my master had been brought before the Council, I, going as was my custom to the Castle, was forbidden entrance, and on the two following days the like happening, I knew not what to do. I was meditating upon this, sorely distressed at my master's unjust imprisonment, when there came to me at the door of our lodging, Grizzie, and beckoning to me to come with her to the archway where we have at times conversed; 'Reuben,' saith she, 'you love your master, would you venture aught of your safety for his sake?'

‘If you speak of my bodily safety, Grizzie,’ said I, ‘I hope I should venture it altogether.’

‘If you would not venture your soul too, I give not a pin for your love,’ saith she in her profane way; ‘but,’ she continued before I could reprove her, ‘do not fear, it is but your stupid body might come to harm, and I see not even why it should. Have you a copy of the letter Mr Kelston wrote to the King?’ and when I said I had (for I had been careful to hide it with my diary when I knew they would search our lodging), she went on to lay before me her ladyship’s plan; how we should ride to London and deliver the letter to his Grace the Commissioner himself (he having gone south from Thirlestane without returning to Edinburgh), and who my lady was sure would not permit Mr Kelston to remain in prison an’ he knew. I, seeing I could not attend my master here, was the more ready to go, and it passed through my mind to be glad if I, rather than David Gourlay, might be the cause of his release, a carnal and unworthy thought for which God forgive me.

Then Grizzie showed me how I was to ride south privily to Kelso, where they would meet me as if by chance, and my lady, hearing of my errand, would permit my joining her company, we crossing the Tweed at that point by boat, and so continuing south into England.

My lady had with her Mr Andrew Gilmour, my lord’s travelling steward and two grooms besides Grizzie. We rode hard for my lady seemed never to weary, and Gilmour sparing no money on horses we came with great speed to Durham, where we rested over the Sabbath, I being more dead than alive, as I think was Grizzie also, and so on to York where we got coach. There rode with us also through Northumberland Sir Cuthbert Moule, very solicitous for my lady’s comfort, and we stayed one night at the house of his mother at Grayshott where we left him for my lady would in no wise permit that he came farther.

At Durham by great good chance I heard that

gracious, soul-satisfying preacher, Mr Veitch, who happened to be there and from him I got the name of a godly man with whom I might safely lodge in London, that great Babylon, it being thought wiser that I went not to my lady's lodging. The day following our arrival Grizzie came to me again, and told me that the Commissioner was at his house at Ham and we must go there, which accordingly we did that very day secretly, by a common hackney. The country and parks are very beautiful, and it seems his Grace has a habit of walking there in his park, and so it turned out. He is a very terrible person, so large and red, and slobbering when he talks; he was astonished to see my lady, but she seems to have no fear of him, though I, standing apart at some distance, could not hear what explanation she gave, only that he laughed and gave her his hand and they walked together, and so presently she called to me and I, trembling greatly, for indeed he is a very great and dangerous man, went forward and gave his Grace Mr Kelston's letter, which he took frowning, but having read it he laughed. 'He is an impertinent young dog,' said he, 'and a taste of the Castle will do him no harm.'

'Aye, a taste doubtless, but he hath been there near on six weeks,' saith my lady; and then, 'If that letter were to reach his Majesty, would not your Grace his Government be made to look foolish, seeing every one knows Mr Kelston meddled not ever in politics? My Lord Shaftesbury and the rest would make rare sport of our Scottish terrors.' And at that he glared at her, so I thought she must sink with fear; but instead, she gives him both her hands very sweetly, and, 'I knew you would not permit our Scotland to be mocked at by such creatures, for surely it is your privilege and none other's, to make the King laugh,' and signing to me to withdraw a little, she talks on, wheedling him, which I do verily think all women can do with men when they have a mind to it, whether they be such fine ladies as my lady, or only such as my poor Grizzie. So be it, at length he led her to her coach and kissed her cheek and she his hand, and he

patted her head and said he would see that she got her way ; and then he told me I was a faithful fellow, but I had best keep out of my Lord Halton's gait, and at that he laughed and so did she. But when we had driven away, she suddenly put her hands over her face and wept and Grizzie, kneeling before her on the floor of the coach, took her in her arms, and she sobbed there on the lassie's breast, so it was right pitiful to hear.

And then when we were back in London said she, ' Mr Halket, I think you should make for home this very day, for though his Grace will keep his word, I think he will not be too well pleased when he thinks over it, and you would be best out of London ' ; and with that she gives me money for my journey and thanks me very prettily for my care of her, adding that she knew I would see to it that Mistress Euphan had Mr Kelston's bed aired for him and all the things he liked most for dinner, for she was sure he would not be long after me of winning back to Kells ; and so I kissed her hand, and Grizzie behind her kissed her own, and here I am at the Angel three days out from London, and to say truth, very glad when I have put an even greater distance between me and that terrible red man."

The lightest of feathery clouds splashed upon a background of gold and crimson hung above the Rhinns when Kelston came home to Kells for the second time. The whin and the broom were golden too in the soft radiance of this summer night and the burns whispered their welcome as they hurried down the hillside ; and into Simon's mind as he raised his eyes to the beauty about him came the words of a psalm learnt as a boy—

"Unto me happily the lines
In pleasant places fell,
Yea, the inheritance I got
In beauty doth excel."

And for once Euphan forgot her shy reserve and cared not what ' the lassies thought ' as, putting her hands

on his shoulders, "Oh, my bairn, my bairn," she cried, tears of joy blinding her as he kissed her withered cheek. Even Gourlay and Halket shook hands with warmth that night.

There had been but one dark spot in his home-coming. His failure to rescue Marion Grier had been bitterly disappointing to Simon, and now the thought of the poor old bed-ridden woman whose daughter was already on her way to some far-distant and cruel slavery haunted his mind. Will Morrison had found the old woman more dead than alive and had brought her to Kells by easy stages ; but there, under Euphan's capable care, she had revived, and Simon, when he went to see her as she half lay, half sat propped up in her clean bed, found her to his surprise content and almost cheerful.

"I have it borne in upon me, sir, that Marion will come back to me and even if that be not the Lord's will, she is in His keeping. He is as near her in the far-off lands as if she was here in Scotland ; it's no a prison can keep Him out."

"That is true," said Simon gravely, "I learnt that in Edinburgh, Mistress Grier." She looked up at him with her wise kindly old eyes. "I thocht that," she said ; "praised be His name."

That night when the household slept Simon opened his door and let himself out by the turret postern. It was hardly dark at all these June nights, and who could desire to sleep between four walls when he was free to go where he pleased ? *Free*—He could hardly believe the door would really open to his hand and had lifted the latch half-fearful of resistance. Outside he turned his face to the hills and walked on and on with his long elastic step, exulting in the wind on his face, till high up on the moorlands he sat down with his back against a boulder, pleasantly tired by the unaccustomed exercise, to wait through the little hour of darkness, alone, yet not alone, until the first streak of light glimmered whitely catching the far-thrown line of the Solway and the new day began. And when the sun was risen he came down to the loch and swam

out in the cool water and so returned hungry as a schoolboy for the bowl of steaming porridge that Euphan had made ready for him.

It would seem the days of miracles were not yet passed, for the morning exercise was but begun the household being assembled, and Kells was reading the 42nd chapter of Isaiah from the Bible which Will Morrison had placed on the table before him, when, the door being open for the warmth of the day, there came into the hall a gaunt and weary woman, who, seeing them thus engaged, took her place among the lassies, no word spoken.

Kelston glanced up, but so deeply had the old mother's faith impressed him that it was without surprise that he recognised Marion Grier; only to the wondering listeners it seemed that a deeper note of triumph rang through the verses as he read on. . . .
"To bring out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord."

It was a wonderful story that Marion Grier had to tell when a few minutes later they crowded about her. She, with other poor folk both men and women, had been put on board ship to be sold for slaves in the Barbadoes; but storms and contrary winds had driven them out of their course and done no little damage to the ship, so that the Master had been glad to put into the Thames and sail up to London for such repairs as were needed; and there, it being found that more damage was done than had been at first thought, it was proposed to transfer the prisoners to another ship and so they were forthwith landed; but certain persons had stirred up the citizens (in London always more in sympathy with the Whigs than elsewhere) to protest that no subject might be sold as a slave from off English soil; and much argument ensuing, the matter had come to the King's ears, and he in good humour, and willing enough to please Puritan London, had granted a free pardon. After that, said Marion, the Lord had not ceased His goodness to them. She had been cared for by a kindly and religious gentlewoman,

a friend of godly Mr Baxter's, who had given her money and sent her to other friends, and so she had been assisted from one place to another, until at last she had won back to Kilwham, and thence, hearing where her mother was, had walked through the night and so come at last to this good house of Kells. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for all His Goodness to the children of men."

CHAPTER IX

THE order for Simon's release had contained one proviso, added doubtless as a sop to my Lord Halton ; it was commanded that Mr Kelston withdraw to his own estate and come not again to the capital without a permit from the Council. Simon had therefore to content himself with writing to Ann a carefully worded epistle which, even should it too be read, could in no way compromise her or my lord. Halket had told him of her journey, and it irked his pride and sense of gratitude not to be able to thank her in person, even though he knew she would understand.

With Halket, too, he had had difficulty since his return, for it was not long before it came to his notice that Reuben no longer attended the kirk with the rest of the household ; and, when taxed with his delinquency, he not only did not deny it but refused amendment, and to his master's astonishment neither threat, argument, nor persuasion could move him. Mr Cant, when at last Simon went to him in some perplexity, bade him leave the young man alone.

"He hath taken some foolish oath, covenanting with the Lord for your life when you lay wounded in Edinburgh ; seems he believed himself in some way to blame for not having prevented the duel (and indeed, Mr Kelston, are you not maybe over ready with the sword ?) and prayed that if the Lord saw fit to spare you, he would never again enter a church to hear one of 'the King's curates,' as he is pleased to call those of us who have accepted the Indulgence."

"Does the fellow really believe he can so bargain with God?" Simon asked, but Mr Cant answered dryly; "There have been many since the patriarch Jacob himself who believed the same," and added that there being none likely to tell tales Mr Kelston might overlook his conduct for the present. "Mayhap as he grows older he will think more kindly of those whose views differ from his." And Simon, though loath to pass what he deemed an insult to a man he both loved and respected, was at last persuaded, touched, in spite of his annoyance, by the affection for himself which had armed his timid secretary to so desperate a resolve.

About the third week in July Sir Walter, coming to Pulquhanity, rode over with the news that the Earl and Countess had left the capital. My lord had been ill, "and no wonder," commented Walter with a shrug. Ann, he added, had had her hands full, but now my lord was well enough to be moved and they had gone to Glenample. The latter part of his news was welcome to Simon, for though he could, he told himself, never pay his debt to Ann he could now at least thank her.

Walter was growing up, he was eighteen, a tall slim youth with much of his mother's good looks and not a little of her charm, though perhaps more than was good for him of her carefulness in matters of health. His study for the Bar had been somewhat interrupted by the advocates' strike, but he had rooms of his own in Edinburgh and was enjoying his emancipation from college and petticoat government; nevertheless he still lacked decision, Simon noted, watching him as he sauntered round the sunny parlour, stopping to look out of the window or to take a book from the shelves, glance at and replace it, unable apparently to settle, while his host, lounging in the armchair, smoked his pipe and waited for something he felt was coming. Presently it came.

"I heard of your imprisonment, sir," Walter burst out. "It has not made his Grace Duke Lauderdale more popular, I can tell you."

"I do not think his Grace had aught to do with it and I should be sorry to add to his troubles," Simon answered lightly.

He had already, since his imprisonment became known, found himself more of a hero than he desired with the neighbouring Whig gentlemen; and he had no wish for sympathy from Walter, but the latter was not to be so easily put off.

"You mean my Lord Halton acts for him, and the Duchess rules them both?" he said. "That is true. Well, what is going to happen to Scotland, think you?" He came to the table and stood leaning heavily on it regarding Simon with a tragic air; and not waiting for an answer, he went on. "The King should be warned, he will need to look to his own if the people be driven much further."

"Warn," said Simon slowly, "is not a word we use to kings. Have you been reading 'Naphtali,' young man?" He spoke more than half in jest; but Walter, still leaning over the table, answered him seriously in a lowered voice. "That is just what I have been reading and to say truly, it makes one think."

Simon whistled. "Certes, my lad, the dungeons of the Castle are not such pleasant quarters that I would recommend them to you; take my advice and burn 'Naphtali' before you find yourself in one of them and—think less."

"That is advice for a child, Mr Kelston; you stopped my coming to Kells Kirk when I was one, but now I am a man." He threw back his brown curls (he still wore his own hair hanging to his shoulders in silken ringlets) and drew himself up.

"That is true enough," Simon admitted, troubled for Ann's sake and not wishing to encourage the young hot-head in what were undoubtedly dangerous sentiments. "But you are not even a Presbyterian," he protested mildly.

"I was not so reared it is true; but as to that, Episcopal clergy too have but recently been suspended for petitioning for a Synod. We are becoming slaves,

no man dare raise his voice, even the women are punished for petitioning." Then, with a swift change to appeal, "You, who have suffered for it, should understand that a man must think these days."

Simon laughed rather ruefully. "Nay, then, seems I suffered for not thinking enough," he said; then laying down his pipe he began to talk seriously.

"Look you, Walter, I do not pretend we are perfectly governed here in Scotland. The King is I think misinformed, for he is at heart no persecutor though he loves not, and that not without reason, us Presbyterian folk. Natheless, you will do no good by wild talk; I desire no more than you do to see the people driven, but governing is not an easy business and we must have patience. You are too young maybe to remember Pentland, but you know doubtless that it did not better things for the people; and now there is less unity than then, a rising would only mean slaughter and stricter laws. Nay, there be these among our rulers, if all tales be true, who would be glad enough of such a rising so they could have excuse for greater persecution."

"That, too, is true," Walter said slowly. "I have heard Gib Burnet say that the Commissioner himself told him he wished the people would rebel so he could bring over an army of Irish papists to cut all their throats."

Simon smiled. "That sounds like his Grace," he said, "and you can take it he did not mean the half of what he said, for, whatever his faults, he is a good Scotsman, yet they would not be sorry for an excuse to crush the West. I have heard the Duke's chaplain, excellent person though he is, owned as much without shame. That is why I would warn you, for the people's sake if not for your own, to be careful."

Glenample House stands some way up a broad and smiling valley in the Forest of Ample, and it took Kelston two days of hard riding through the hill passes to reach it; but Rosedean, lying some few miles farther up the dale, he would, he thought, ride

on there after he had seen Ann, for Rosedean himself having found security for his fine had at last won out of prison. At Glenample, however, Simon found a welcome not only from Ann but from my lord. The latter, wearied with convalescence and a house full of clergy, would not hear of Mr Kelston's departure. "Stay and play chess with me," he besought him, "though I cannot offer you much entertainment," he added confidentially, "for to say truth his Grace of Glasgow, who is with us, is just a little too holy for this world."

Ann had made her peace with my lord, and the care and solicitude with which she had nursed him back to some sort of health had convinced him of her disinterestedness and made him the more eager to welcome Kelston, who, in turn, was the more ready to accept in that he surmised shrewdly that to amuse her husband was the best way that he could assist Ann. Lady Kennedy, who, more delicate than ever, now lived almost entirely at Glenample, did not, however, look favourably upon her cousin. She knew nothing of the duel but some one had told her of his imprisonment, and it was now quite certain that he was no longer in favour at Court. His Grace of Lauderdale himself was no more devout believer in the Royal supremacy than was Ann's mother, and she was at first inclined to treat Mr Kelston with coldness if not severity; but Simon, when he chose, was an adept at the gentle art of wheedling; it was not for nothing that he had learnt to draw the King from his darker moods and even to disarm his mother, the sad Queen herself.

Lady Kennedy soon found it impossible to resist one from whom she could cull so many intimate details of royalty, who spoke with such admiration of the King's heroism during the great fire and of the generosity shown by the late Princess of Orange to her brothers when in exile. And as he saw the shadow pass from Ann's tired young face Simon felt the effort well worth the making. She came out to him later, carrying him off to see the Linn where the

Ample leapt tossing itself between the high rocks below their feet.

"It is a lovely spot," she owned, "though not so beautiful as Kells."

"Less wild," he admitted looking at the hills that rose about them in gentle folds towards the Forest of Ample. Then half to himself, "I am glad you have so much beauty about you," and as she looked at him quickly he added, "you never seemed quite yourself in a town."

She smiled. "I love the country best," she made answer, and a silence fell between them.

"You have twice come to my rescue," he said presently, and as she repeated the number in some surprise, "yes, twice: when Madame died you saved my reason I do verily believe and now you have given me liberty. I do not think until I saw the Rhinns again I quite realised how much that could mean. Will you do me yet one more favour, my cousin?"

"Willingly," she answered and held out her hand, but his face was grave as he took it, looking down at her.

"I would ask your promise that if ever at any time you are in need of help for yourself or for any dear to you, you will call upon me—nay, I do not attempt to repay what you have done for me, I am content to owe you these things, yet I should be glad to know you could feel free to use me when and where you would."

She looked at him steadily for a moment. He must needs be some one's knight she thought tenderly, then, "Thank you, Simon," she said. "I shall like to feel I may do that." He bent and kissed her hand. "That is a bargain then," he said more lightly. They strolled back slowly, stopping to watch the bent figure of the Archbishop pacing the terrace in melancholy reverie.

"He is very unhappy I am afraid, poor man," Ann told her cousin. "He has sent in his resignation again and this time he thinks the King will accept it. He is distressed at the divisions and cruelties, but

feels he has no power to put them right ; the Presbyterians will never meet him in anything and I think our own people do not thank him."

"Truly, I think he meant well, but I doubt if he ever understood the problem with which he tried to cope," Simon defended his own people. "It is not easy for those of us who can explain away an oath when it ceases to be convenient, to realise what the Covenant meant, and means, to those who, as David would tell you, 'are no sae soople in the conscience.'"

She laughed and asked for David, she must see that he was not pestered in her Episcopalian household, she said ; but Simon assured her that David could be trusted to see to that himself. "He is too old a campaigner and has too good an opinion of himself to be easily put down," his master explained. But just how true this was, neither of them quite realised till, coming up the steep path to the winter garden, they came upon the subject of their talk. His hat was in one hand as with the other he illustrated dramatically the narration with which he was holding her ladyship's mother spellbound, as she reclined in a sheltered harbour.

"There was the Earl of Cleveland and Sir James Hamilton and I know not who more forby, rallied what force they had and charged the enemy in the Sudbury Street and High Street ; Sir James and Captain Kemble were both wounded there, and I'm no' saying but that that action did much to secure his Majesty's march out by St Martin's Gate ; nathless 'twas my master thought on the waggon shot down one of the oxen to block the way and defended the gate himself. His Highness was sweer enough to leave him, but my master was wounded nigh to death already, 'so there is little I could do for your Majesty an' I rode with you,' says he, and he kissed his Highness's hand. 'Maybe you'll mind my boy,' says he, and the King stooping kissed my master's cheek and——"

Simon laid his hand on Ann's arm and drew her back. " 'Hazels of Kells burn' —let him have his hour,"

said he, and as they walked round by another path he told her of David's secret admiration and of how he had first learnt it.

CHAPTER X

By '77 the troubles in Scotland were increasing daily. Lauderdale, more than ever under his wife's domination, had his hands full maintaining his place against his enemies in England; he considered the Presbyterians had shown little appreciation of his so-called indulgences, and now treated them in consequence with greater severity than ever. Leighton, the one man among the prelates who had he been less timid might have restrained this fury, had given up the Archbishopric of Glasgow and retired to England, his place having been retaken by the former Archbishop, Alexander Burnet, a man of very different temper.

In spite of the drastic edicts against them conventicles abounded everywhere, and because they had more than once been dispersed with bloodshed and rapine, men now came to them armed for defence; so that these meetings, which in early days had been for religious worship only, were more and more becoming points of real danger to the Government and rallying places for disaffected and rebellious subjects.

A new generation was growing up, undisciplined, critical of old loyalties and ready to fight to the death for what it deemed its rights. Naphtali, *Lex Rex*, and other condemned works flooded the country from Holland; it was useless for the Government to order their destruction at the hands of the common hangman; for every volume that was secured and burned two were secreted, read, passed on, and read again by eager young partisans. The King's right to rule was questioned as it had never been before. His Majesty, it was openly repeated, had been chosen and brought back as a covenanted monarch; he had sworn publicly and privately, by many holy oaths, to keep the Covenants and uphold the Kirk; in breaking these oaths

and utterly undoing all that he had sworn to secure, had he not, it was asked, also destroyed his claim to loyalty and affection and forfeited the crown by his perjured and tyrannical conduct toward his Kirk and people? It was as well for the Government already shaken by its own vices, that with this growing rebellion was growing also a cleavage between the Presbyterians themselves, the very cleavage indeed which had been foreseen by those who would from the beginning have refused all indulgence; for this rising generation, bred in the hard school of persecution and intolerance, had little sympathy with the patience and purely passive resistance of its elders who, even while unable to accept the Indulgence for themselves, had treated the indulged as brethren. Not so the younger hot-heads; to them the 'King's curates' were as greatly to be abhorred as the conformist clergy, the 'Bishops' curates' themselves. 'Taste not, touch not, handle not', was the motto of the school among whom Robert Hamilton, Walter's old college mate, was already becoming a leader. He, indeed, would have men go a step further; not only the indulged but those who consorted with the indulged were to be anathema in the eyes of Scotland's covenanted and holy remnant.

Walter himself, still studying for the Bar and imbibing many new doctrines in Parliament House and its adjoining taverns, knew not in these days what to think. His mother would long ago have imbued him with a blind loyalty and the staunchest of Episcopalian sentiments, had not her influence been at an early age counteracted by that of his foster-mother and the Pulquhanity tenants in whose company so much of his delicate childhood had been spent. If most of these had by now conformed or sought shelter under more amenable landlords it had been, for the most part, the conformity of convenience; there was little doubt as to where their sympathies wandered. Walter had been only ten when Sandy Morrison was hanged, but he remembered the mad boy, as who in the three parishes did not, and the story of his death

told and retold of a winter evening with descriptions of Dalyell, the 'Moscovy beast', and the barbarities of Turner and his 'lambs' was no whit calculated to endear the Government to a sensitive and imaginative child. Nor had the scholarly sermons of Mr Burnet, or the almost too heavenly discourses of Archbishop Leighton, the power to hold him that had those stolen, homely, yet powerful sermons of Mr Cant's delivering. And above all, haunting his waking memory and at times startling him from his dreams, rang the call of that never-to-be-forgotten Prophet of Rutherglen. Many a night had he started up shivering and fearful in his curtained bed, dread-full of the Touch that was to claim him, listening in breathless expectancy for the Voice that would call him forth to martyrdom.

But on a day of early summer as he rode down to Glenample for a few days of rest and merry-making it was not these things that filled Walter's mind. He had been ill again and Ann had written begging him to come to her. He had not told Ann of his illness until he was once more recovered, a fact of which he was not a little proud, for his instinct had been always to fly to her in his troubles only this time a sort of shame had kept him from it. His mother's constant delicacy and her lord's recurring ill-health gave Ann plenty of nursing; life could not be altogether rosy for the Countess, her brother thought with a stab of compunction, though he had never heard her complain, never indeed seen her aught but cheerful and apparently content.

It was a glorious afternoon, he was after all in no great hurry to arrive, and it occurred to him that it would be pleasant to send his horse by road with his man and walk to the Ample Linn. The thought was no sooner born than carried out. The path was an easy one and he had been that way before; the sunlight flickered through the trees throwing golden patterns before his feet and the air was full of scents. Yet Walter's heart was not as light as it should have been; his mother, Ann had written, greatly desired

to see him and Walter's lower lip shot out in a discontented pout ; he knew very well, he thought, what his mother wanted ; he would soon be twenty-one and of age, and she would like to see him safely married before he became too entirely his own master. She had a young lady in her mind too, of that he felt sure, a far-off relation of her own, an orphan with well-cared for estates but fat, stupid, and only fifteen. This was no time to marry with the country at sixes and sevens, and besides, if he must marry, he preferred to choose his own wife. There were girls in Edinburgh who were neither fat nor stupid ; but for his part, he did not care for girls, he would as lief live at Pulquhanity as Mr Kelston did at Kells, without a wife at all.

He stepped out of the woods on to the steep bank of a little open glade where a burn ran down between the hills to the Ample. The sunlight almost blinded him, coming as he did from the shade of the trees, for the glade was golden with whin and the deeper gold of the broom, the burn danced singing over its stones, and the whole air was heavy with the scent of whin and the voluptuous sweetness of the hawthorn.

‘And up and spake the Faery Queene
Out o’ a bush o’ broom,’

the youth murmured to himself as he stood for a moment blinking at the blaze of gold ; and almost as he said it, under a hawthorn tree, her face raised to its white blossoms, her eyes half-shut as she drank in its perfume, he saw her, the Faery Queene herself—or was she some heathen goddess of the grove ?

He held his breath looking at her afraid to move lest she vanish from his sight ; she seemed indeed part of the glory, for her hair in the sunlight was golden as the broom, her body as slim as an aspen wand, and her mouth red as—as—she hesitated for a word, and with that she turned her head and saw him, and slowly, as she sat unmoving, her heavy-lidded eyes holding his, the red lips parted in that strange secret smile that belonged to one, and one only.

"There is no scent on the earth just like the hawthorn, Sir Walter," said she for all the world as if they had finished their last speech but a moment before.

"Grizzie," whispered Walter, and again, "Grizzie," and he came down the bank and took her hands in his. "I thought you were the Faery Queene," he said with a queer little laugh.

She looked up at him sidelong and laughed too. "Maybe I am," said she, and then hardly above her breath (for she too knew the ballad), "or mayhap I be but poor Janet awaiting Tam Lin himself."

"You have grown mighty bonnie, whoever you be," he said and sat down beside her. "I did not know you at first. How was it you knew me; you could not tell I would come this way yet you were not surprised?"

She shook her head; her eyes were no longer on his but had dropped to the hawthorn spray she twisted between her slim fingers.

"No, I could not—tell—you would come," she said very slowly.

"But I believe you willed me to come," he cried. "Grizzie, were you thinking of me? for 'deed troth, lassie, you could draw whom you will, I do believe."

The glory was still in his eyes and the sensuous scent in his nostrils.

"Do you remember yon night in the boat?" he whispered and put an arm about her. "There never was anyone just like you, Grizzie," said he very softly.

The girl turned in his arms, her shoulder to him, her head thrown a little back; her face under its halo of gold was very white and still, her red lips—yes, it was the hip-berries her lips were like—were very near his own. Suddenly Walter's timidity faded as his manhood thrilled to life at her touch. Catching her slim body back across his knee his arms closed about her, and as, with her head on his shoulder, her hand stole up about his neck, his face dropped to hers, lips clinging to lips in the passionate joy of his first kiss.

In the garden by the bowling alley Sir George Mackenzie was entertaining Lady Kennedy with the gossip of the town; they were old friends and shared many views. In the alley itself young Malise Scott, my lord's nephew, was playing bowls with Sir Cuthbert Moule under the eye of Mistress Alicia Douglas, and their laughter and gay voices proclaimed them well amused, for indeed Mistress Alicia was neither so fat nor so stupid as Sir Walter deemed her.

Ann lifted her eyes from her embroidery frame to watch them for a moment before turning once more to Captain Scott, who, leaning over the back of her chair, was offering advice anent the heraldic design on which she worked. Francis Scott greatly admired the Countess, had done so ever since he had seen her in high temper on the day when the Earl nearly killed her cousin on the Leith Links.

Perhaps it was the thought of that day, or some chance mention of his Grace of St Andrews by Sir George, made Francis remark now à propos of nothing in particular.

"They have sent that fellow Mitchell to the Bass, I hear."

"Mitchell?" Then with a little frown, "Oh, the mad creature who shot at his Grace? But I thought——" Ann paused with sudden sickening remembrance of the miserable business.

"No, no, they did nothing," Francis said hurriedly; he realised that he had blundered in his choice of a subject but had to continue, for the Countess was waiting. "The fact is they could prove nothing, for though he confessed on promise of his life 'twas but privately to the Chancellor, and when they would have him repeat it he refused, having been warned, 'tis said, to be sure of his limbs as well as his neck, so though they tortured him for a confession they got nothing to prove his guilt."

"How horrible," said Ann with a shiver. "Surely the law is a strange business." But Sir George, catching the last word, protested and the talk became general.

"Walter is surely late," Lady Kennedy said ner-

vously. "I expected him an hour since. I trust no harm has come to the child."

The others hastened to reassure her; it was, of course, useless to remind her that Walter was no longer a child, though Malise Scott, who was but sixteen and considered himself a man, could not forbear smiling.

Sir Cuthbert crossed to Ann's side and stooped to examine the embroidery. She looked up at him with a smile. Her husband liked Cuthbert and he had been more than once at Glenample; she was glad he was here now, for she dreaded this visit of Walter's though she could not have told why.

"There is a curtain," said he, speaking so that she only could hear him, for the others were deep in an argument as to the better modes and routes of travel to the capital, "which hangs before a recessed cupboard in Mr Kelston's chamber at Kells, the embroidery of which I much admire; the design is of white roses and the lilies of France."

"Indeed?" said she demurely and the dimple he loved to provoke played at the corner of her mouth. Then, with sudden interest, "You have seen Mr Kelston but lately then?"

"I saw him two weeks since; I visited Kells on my way North. Is it De Kéroualle keeps him from Court, think you?" he asked with abrupt change of tone. As she looked her surprise, "that is what is said at St James's, it is said the King would have had him back long since but for her; he was against her return ('tis said) and she will not forgive him; but as to the truth of it, she gets the blame of many things, I do think, being vastly unpopular. And," he added, as if in defence of his friend, "I think he would not wish to go back, so wedded is he now to Kells, though, for my part I should not desire to live in the West these days."

"Ah, the poor West," she sighed. "But he is not troubled? General Dalyell promised to remove Captain De Morgan."

"And has done so, sending him to hunt down con-

venticles in Fife, a fitting service truly ! ” Sir Cuthbert shrugged his contempt for the ex-guardsman and as she still regarded him anxiously, “ No, Mr Kelston suffers less annoyances than his neighbours, I fancy ; it is still believed he hath power at his back and the Depute treats him with much respect ; but there is scarce a house in the neighbourhood where the soldiers have not made free, and now there is this talk of a heritor’s bond which troubles many.”

“ Yes, my lord is troubled about that too for indeed to expect us to answer for all our tenants is beyond reason ; ’tis of that very matter my lord has gone even now to consult with his Grace of Hamilton. ’Tis not possible for all these gentlemen to answer for their wives (even Duke Hamilton and the Chancellor cannot be sure of theirs !) let alone their tenants. My lord says he thanks God I am an Episcopalian,” she ended with a laugh. But Cuthbert looked gloomy. “ I wish you were out of this hateful country,” he muttered with suppressed passion, but Ann’s patriotic soul flared up at once. “ Nay then, nowhere could be more hateful to me than London,” she protested ; and as he dared not explain that London was not the part of England he pictured for her he had to accept the rebuke in silence.

“ Sir Walter’s horse and man are arrived ; he is walking by the woods,” said Malise, who had wandered off to the stables, and now returned in great excitement. “ Gilmour says he should have been here long since.”

Lady Kennedy was at once on edge about her darling but Ann interrupted quickly, soothing her. “ What nonsense, Malise ; of course if he has walked it will delay him ; who would wish to hurry on so warm a day ? Pray do not distress yourself, my-lady ; he will be here presently.” And as if to prove her words, “ Here comes the truant,” quoth Sir George and Walter came slowly down the path from the house.

“ Where have you been, my son ? We feared lest accident had overtaken you,” cried his mother as he kissed her hand.

“ Accident ? Why, what accident could befall

me?" he laughed a trifle excitedly. "Are not all things arranged for us; how then can aught come by accident?" he enquired of the company at large; and it struck Cuthbert that he had a curiously fevered look.

"Why, now you engage us in the problem of Free Will and Election," said Sir George ironically; he thought the young man had been drinking; but once again the peacemaker came to the rescue, carrying her brother off for the rest and refreshment which he must she was sure require.

CHAPTER XI

SIMON had lived very quietly since his return to Kells, occupying himself with the care of his estate and seeing little of the neighbouring lairds, few of whom indeed now lived on their land, some being already in prison or in exile, even Conformists preferring a voluntary banishment to the constant annoyances of so ill-named a countryside. But Sir Cuthbert had spoken truly when he described Kelston as wedded to Kells; ever since the autumn morning when its beauty had laid a healing touch upon his broken life his home had entwined itself more and more about his heart, and his enforced absence had only made it the dearer. To stand at his own door watching the colours change and deepen on the Rhinns, or to see the Black Craig sparkling after rain, breathing the while the sweet clean scents of the moorland, filled him with infinite satisfaction; and in all that pertained to the improvement of his land Morrison found him an apt pupil.

In the old days, in the midst of the busy Court and the unceasing social activities which his life with the King had involved, Simon had lived always his secret life of dreams; now the habit returned with new force. The vivid assurance of Christ as a Reality had brought with it the assurance of life's continuance; he no longer thought of Madame as dead, cut off and

gone from him for ever; the sea which divided them now was neither so broad nor so deep as those Straits of Dover across which his thoughts had so often hungrily sought her; now, too, she was no longer bound to Philippe, the victim of his favourites, wearied by his jealousy, cramped, misunderstood, dissatisfied. There had been times when the knowledge of all she was suffering beyond those narrow seas had been almost more than he could bear; now he could afford to wait untroubled, believing her at peace.

Left to himself Simon might have dreamed on thus, unconcernedly, accepting his new faith as he had accepted his old loyalty without question, though perhaps with little advance in knowledge; but Mr Cant, to whom he had once half shyly spoken of his experience in the Castle, would not permit him to rest there. John Cant was neither a dreamer nor a sentimentalist; if a man claimed belief he must be ready to give a reason for the faith that was in him; it was because they rested content at the threshold, having sighted the Lord's fair garden but never troubling to rise up and enter in, that so many souls fell away, losing the path among the mists and clouds of life. Simon's ignorance seemed to him abysmal, and he took him to task with gentle severity, finding him submissive enough, though it was unlikely that he would ever make of him a theologian. On one point, indeed, Simon remained unconvinced; he could not see that so a man won Christ it mattered by what road he had travelled; the Mass might be idolatrous and the Sectaries run to mad extremes—he admitted the danger of such ways, had no desire to follow them—but could not see they were wicked nor even (so they were done in sincerity) that they must be displeasing to God; he had, he declared with whimsical good humour, known saints even among bishops, and he scandalised Euphan by owning to an admiration for Montrose.

In August the new Heritor's Bond had been proclaimed, causing anxiety and indignation in many parts of the country; for indeed it was a hard re-

quirement that landlords should be asked to bind themselves, under severe penalty, for the attendance at church not only of their wives and families but of their servants and tenants ; as also that these be not present at any conventicle, or baptise or marry with outed ministers, a bond in many cases impossible to keep, and likely, therefore, to be fruitful in fines. Kelston heard of it, but it was harvest time and he was busy and gave it little attention, though it occurred to him to wonder how far his permit would cover his household should the bond be pressed. He was walking home from an outlying farm toward the end of October, rejoicing in the riot of colour which the autumn brought to Kells and finding it in his heart to be sorry that old M'Gow, who had owned the farm and had died that morning, could not see its beauty. On passing through the village he noticed an unusual stir about the place ; the cottagers stood at their doors talking in groups and even the children looked cowed and troubled. Only one thing could account for this kind of anxiety and Simon was not surprised to find on entering the courtyard that three troopers were busy rubbing down their horses, while one of the stable lads stood by sulkily holding a fourth. Soldiers were birds of ill-omen to the West, but Kelston, about to enquire the meaning of this visit, was relieved to recognise Bryant, Telfer's old sergeant.

"The Captain is within, sir," the man told him civilly, and Kelston, having called out William to look to the men's comfort, went in to greet his friend. He had not seen Telfer since that young man had appeared triumphantly at the gate of the castle with an order for Mr Kelston's release in his pocket and his sword beneath his arm. Now he found him bubbling with excitement, but refused to listen to his news until he was refreshed and rested for it was evident from the horses that he had ridden hard, "unless, of course, you have come to arrest me again ?" After dinner Telfer could be suppressed no longer. "It is a message from the Duke himself ;

the fact is, between you and me, his Grace was not too well-pleased with my Lord Halton's zeal and there were high words between them, or maybe I should say high words on the part of his Grace and sulky looks on Halton's. Now it is this business of the bond; the bishops are pressing it, but the heritors are holding back; and even where they have taken it, it has not brought in what they had hoped, so now certain noblemen and gentlemen are being appointed to see it carried out in the counties. Broughton has got Kirkeudbright, but because the Stewartry is like to be a fruitful place he needs assistants and when Dalyell suggested your name his Grace agreed very heartily. You are lucky, Mr Kelston, with all the rebels down here. You should make a fortune out of it, for you are to get a share in the fines, of course."

Simon's face showed his perplexity; he was obliged to his Grace for his kindly intention, but he did not understand. Telfer made haste to produce his commission, and Simon read it carefully; the law terms mystified him somewhat but the gist was plain enough. He was empowered to put the laws relating to conventicles into execution against his neighbours, fining (and receiving a share where he fined) any person against whom the Council had given sentence, sending in lists of suspected persons against whom sentence could be given.

As he read his brows drew together, and when he looked up at last his likeness to the King was more than usually noticeable—the King at his haughtiest.

"I do not know what I have done to merit the contempt of the Council; but if I have done aught to deserve it I would rather receive punishment from my Lord Halton than be insulted by the Duke, seeing that his Grace's age and rank forbid my resenting it at his hands."

Telfer was aghast; no insult was intended.

"Lord! sir, the highest in the land are acting in this, Atholl, Glencairn, Argyle"—he rattled off half a dozen other names, ticking them off on his fingers.

Simon shrugged his shoulders, "Aristocratic company, certes ! I wonder they do not apply to Will Chiffinch for back-stairs work and a share in his perquisites." He was too angry to choose his words. "Listen," said he and began to read from the instructions: "'You are to inform yourself of all persons guilty of withdrawing from public ordinances in the parish churches, of keeping conventicles in houses or fields, disorderly marriages or baptisms, and send in a list of their names, designations, and the persons to whom they are tenants, to the clerks of the Privy Council. . . . You may alway convene any of those persons before the Steward. You are to inform yourself of the rents of their estates or sums due to them, and cause arrest the same. . . . You are to poind the goods of such persons. . . . You are to apprehend and imprison all intercommuned persons or fugitives on your list. . . . You are to inform yourself what diligence sheriffs and other magistrates use in prosecuting the laws against conventicles and other disorders, and report to the Council'—you are in fact to act as a spy upon spies as well as a spy upon your neighbours—And you tell me Argyle is consenting to this ? Ye gods !" He threw the commission back on to the table and stood glaring at it. "I have seen men hanged, caught spying in an enemy's camp ; theirs was clean work to this," he said bitterly.

Telfer watched him, biting his nail the while in some perplexity. "Ecod !" he said, "put like that I own it sounds an ugly business—but—his Grace will be mighty mad if you refuse."

Simon sat down with a weary gesture ; his anger, always short lived, had passed but it had fatigued him. He knew too that he was burning his boats.

"I regret to annoy his Grace," he said, "but I cannot help it," and added half to himself, "I never did the King's dirty work ; I am too old to begin doing the Council's." He looked across at Telfer's rueful face and laughed ; that Telfer did not relish having to impart his refusal to Lauderdale was evident. "Never fear, we must concoct some excuse will

soothe his Grace," he comforted the soldier. But where the excuse was to come from he did not know.

Reuben, who was called in later to assist in writing the refusal, was, to his master's surprise, loath to do it. "If you refuse some one else less honourable will take it and the county suffer the more," he protested.

"Could you not hold the commission without acting?" asked Telfer. "Seeing you are only paid by the fines, you will be robbing no one."

"You are . . . once every three months to send in an exact account of your diligence," Simon quoted. "I fear that excellent plan fails; I should most certainly have to offer you as the first victim, Halket, and fine myself accordingly."

Which argument being unanswerable, Reuben said no more; but after Telfer had retired to rest, it having been agreed to leave the matter until morning, Reuben sought his master.

"Sir, if you will, I will leave you."

"Do you wish to leave me?" Reuben was full of surprises. He shook his head now with a short "No;" and Simon was touched to see tears in his eyes. Laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "Can you not see your way to come back to the Church?" he asked him. The tears spilled over.

"Oh! sir, one may not so break an oath, even if it be to one's hurt that it was made."

"Or to one's master's," thought Simon ruefully but he did not press his secretary. After all, unless he could find some plausible excuse his refusal would undoubtedly enrage Lauderdale, and Reuben's defection would be a mere drop in the bucket. Even Mr Cant, who had come up on hearing of the soldiers' arrival, though he agreed that the commission was an ugly one owned that his first thought had been Reuben's, though he confessed also with humility that the thought was cowardly.

That night Simon let himself out once more when the household slept. It was dark but he knew every step of his way by now and the cool air in his face refreshed him. On the heights he drew his cloak

about him and sat down to think out his problem ; unless he could appease Lauderdale he might have few more nights to sit thus in freedom, he thought with sinking heart. Lauderdale had quarrelled with all his old friends and advisers ; Simon could not therefore trust to his old affection to save him. Suddenly his love of Kells cried out in rebellion against fate ; why should he be called upon to give up his freedom, his peace, he who had never mixed himself in politics, had been always content to live and let live ? Why had this thing come to him ?

“ If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross.” Mr Cant had read these words that very night at prayers ; they came back to Simon now with a fresh force. He stood up, squaring his shoulders as if he received an order ; he had once prayed that like his namesake he might be found worthy to carry the Lord’s cross ; that could not be if he refused now to carry his own. This question of not complying was not, as he saw it, a religious one but his bare duty as a gentleman. The moon had risen late ; now from where he stood he could see the black outline of Kells Tower ; better to leave it than disgrace it. No, if he could not appease the Commissioner he must take the consequences ; Kells should never harbour a paid spy while a Kelston held the land—but how beautiful the land was.

Simon, adding a thanksgiving to his nightly prayers for so timely a reminder, went home and slept dreamlessly till dawn. David, drawing the curtains and laying out his clothes, dropped a shoe with a clatter and woke him ; he opened an eye, turned on his side and slept again for a moment, and in that moment dreamt he was back at Whitehall. Charles came through the private door with a letter in his hand ; he sat down in the sedan which had not been removed and frowned at Simon. Simon put his own handless sleeve into his pocket so Charles should not see it ; he knew the letter was from Louis and he supposed it meant the Tower. Then Charles said peevishly, “ Well, it is your own fault ; why could you not be quiet in

Scotland; then he would not have noticed you? Oddsfish, Sim, you are a fool," and then just as he was about to explain he woke again. For a moment longer he lay watching David pouring water into a large wooden bath. David, he thought lazily, looked more lugubrious than usual; then he remembered, but with remembrance came also the way of escape. He sat up and laughed aloud. "Why, of course, Charles is right; I am a fool," said he.

Captain Telfer stayed one day longer and had excellent sport in the Ken, and when he rode north next day he bore with him a respectful but absolute refusal. Mr Kelston was duly grateful to his Grace, but he could undertake no public commission of any sort without the special permission of his Majesty; his Grace being so absolutely in his Majesty's confidence would, he knew, understand the reason though in his multifarious and onerous duties he had in kindness to Mr Kelston overlooked it for the moment. "His Grace either does know, or more like he does not; but if the latter he will, being the man he is, not own to ignorance and will for fear of showing it let the matter drop; leastways, that is the only chance," Simon explained to Telfer; and as the weeks passed with no further word, save a message from Telfer saying all was well, it seemed he had judged correctly.

One other incident arose to trouble him. A week or so after Telfer's visit the curate came to Kells Tower and asked to see its owner. It was long since he had crossed the doorstep though Kelston had met him more than once lounging about Pulquhanity.

Now he stood twiddling his hat in his hand and looking about him with a somewhat sheepish grin. "I have heard the great news, sir; I would congratulate you, but I would not have intruded only that I have fery important news, sir, that you ought certainly to know, fery important."

"Put on your bonnet, Mr Macpherson, and be seated," Simon said courteously. "You will like a glass of wine before starting upon your business, I doubt not; as to your congratulations, I have many

reasons for congratulations, I am aware, but I do not know to which you refer."

The curate grinned more broadly than ever; he never refused a good offer, and he was delighted to find that Mr Kelston either knew nothing or chose to ignore his share in bringing the troopers in search of Mr Weston. He drank several glasses of wine with great relish and then Kelston, afraid if he went on longer he would be unable to proceed with his tale, enquired as to his news.

"It is the farmer at Garryford," said Macpherson, leaning forward and dropping his voice to a confidential whisper. "He never conformed with a good grace and his wife has never conformed at all; they are all damned upsetting people; I have been fery patient with them, fery, only he has been fined for his wife and had soldiers quartered upon him; but lately I reported him to her ladyship and she said they must quit; she is a fery sensible, religious person. I told him he must go, but he said he would not without he got notice from Sir Walter for now Sir Walter is of age; and so I wrote to Sir Walter, and he wrote back telling me to mind my own business and leave his tenants alone—fery rude and abusive he was indeed, which I was not expecting from the son of so excellent a lady. And whose business is it if not mine, I ask you?"

"Well, not mine anyway," said Kells distastefully, eyeing the curate; but Mr Macpherson was unabashed. "But is it not? It is inteed or I have been fery misinformed, for I will be hearing you are appointed commissioner for the Stewartry; and indeed, sir, you have here an excellent opportunity, you can send in Garryford's name to the Council and fine Sir Walter at once. Oh yes, and I will tell you, there is more against Sir Walter: he is too much with Mr Robert Hamilton and other Presbyterian dogs (asking your pardon) you can punish him, I assure you, oh fery severely, I do fery well believe." The curate's small eyes glitttered at the prospect. Walter had never troubled to hide his contempt for him and even Lady

Kennedy, devout Episcopalian though she was, would never have dreamt of allowing him to sit at her table to dessert. Highland pride burned in Mr Macpherson's short plump body and now he was sure of his revenge.

Simon got up. "I am sorry that you have had so much trouble in coming here," he said in his cool, slightly ironic voice, "for you have been misinformed. I have no commission to persecute my neighbours, and that being so, I need not take up any more of your doubtless valuable time," and as the curate stared at him blankly, he raised his voice a little and called Morrison. "See his reverence out," he said, "his business here is finished; and good morning to you Mr Macpherson."

It had been easy enough to silence the curate but that, Kells was well aware, did not end the affair. Walter was heading for storms and must not, for Ann's sake, be allowed to shipwreck; but how was it to be prevented? Garryford? He must go and see Garryford; he had heard his farm was doing ill of late, perhaps—yes, that was an idea—perhaps he could persuade him to take over old M'Gow's. If he could get him on to his own land he would have the right to attend Kells Kirk and it would save the situation for Walter. As to the curate's other accusations, he must have time to think over them.

CHAPTER XII

THE snow which had been coming down in desultory fashion for some days had now settled into a steady fall and the roads were fast becoming impassable. With his cloak about him Simon was riding home. He was returning from a meeting to which the gentlemen of the Stewartry had been called to discuss the bond, and much though he desired to keep himself free from public affairs, it had been impossible to refuse this meeting. Matters in the West were fast coming to a crisis; the refusal to sign the bond had been almost universal; it was neither law, justice, nor common

sense ; and now the rulers of Scotland, urged on, it was said, by the bishops, were threatening to disarm the county ; had threatened (said rumour) to make Duke Hamilton himself walk without his sword, if the bond was not signed. And on the head of all came murmurs of a host of ruffian Highlanders, ' a people differing in habit, language, and manners from all mankind,' who were to be let loose on the unfortunate West. The meeting had been excited and the talk fast and furious, for even those who had little interest in Church government were growing restive under the threats and injustice of the Council ; how could they be expected, it was asked, to put down rebellion, if they were to have all arms taken from them ? And besides, every one in the West knew that though conventicles might abound they would, if not interfered with, do no harm ; all were agreed that toleration would sooner quell disturbance than any forcing or quartering of soldiers ; but as more than one noted bitterly, it was not peace but an opportunity to crush their opponents that the prelates desired.

To Simon an added tragedy in it all was that the King, himself no persecutor, was being forced into a position which could not but weaken his popularity and might in the end bring about his downfall ; his own affection for Charles cried out against the injustice which he was powerless to prevent, for he had long ago realised that no letter of his would, even if it reached him, influence the King ; and the managers of Scotland now saw to it that no one left the country without permission.

His thoughts had gone back rather sadly to old days as he urged his tired horse through the storm ; he would be but a ghost if he were to return to Court now, so many changes had taken place, so many old friends gone, a new Duchess of York, the little Lady Mary married to that dour young Dutchman, poor little lass. The snow beat in his face and the horse was becoming restive, and the thought that in the candle-lit parlour at Kells supper would be laid, and a jug of mulled claret awaiting him by the fire was decidedly com-

forting. "Steady, lad," for the horse had suddenly shied and stopped dead, quivering with fear; in the path before them, half covered with drifting snow, lay a dark bundle. Simon dismounted, and with the rein over his right arm, bent and turned it over; it was a woman. So cold and still she lay that for a moment he thought her dead; the horse whinnied softly as if in sympathy. Surely, thought Simon, he knew that white face with its black eyebrows under the short golden curls. Lady Glenample's maid, Grizzie? What had happened? Had Ann sent him some message? He knelt down, wrapped her in his cloak, and chafed her cold hands; presently she stirred and moaned. So far good, she was not dead; the next thing was to get her to shelter.

"Steady, lad," he adjured the horse again, and with an effort lifted her, cloak and all, to his saddle bow, then swinging himself up behind her, he settled her into a more comfortable position against his shoulder, and once more urged his beast to face the storm. It could not be much more than a couple of miles now, he thought, but it was difficult to see the path; twice he found they were off the track, after which he left it to the horse and got on better. Suddenly he saw a light ahead and answered a welcome shout.

"We thought you would be finding the pad difficult to keep in this weather," said David, and added hurriedly, "Michty me! Kells, what have you there?"

"Faith, I am not sure," his master answered; and to the lad, "get on home, James, and tell Mistress Morrison to warm a bed; I have found a woman in the snow,"

Said Gourlay, as later that evening he piled logs on to the fire and lighted his master's pipe, "Do ye mistake yourself for King David in the Cave of Adullam, may I ask, Kells?"

"Eh?" said Simon, who was sleepy after an excellent dinner.

"And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discon-

tented gathered themselves unto him,' see 1st Samuel," quoted David solemnly.

"'And there were with him about four hundred men,'" his master capped it, recollecting the passage. "Faith, Davie, it begins to look like it, I admit, though in our case most of 'em are women. But what, I ask you, could I do this time, seeing I could not leave her to die in the snow?"

"She is with child," said David gloomily.

"Another for the garrison," murmured Simon and blew out a long column of smoke. David grinned acknowledgment of the hit, then shook his head.

"I always knew she was a wanton," he said relapsing into gloom. His master shrugged an indifferent shoulder. "Poor little devil, she had not much chance with that face; the world's a dam' hard place for women, Dave. Is she come to herself yet?"

"Nay, but she is quiet enough now, Euphan says. At first she talked wild and 'twas all to do keeping her in bed."

Simon frowned. "Can Euphan manage her herself? I do not want talk among the women."

"Euphan'll see to that," David nodded understandingly.

The child was born that night, a tiny creature born before its time but healthy enough. Grizzie too, Euphan informed her master, was, for all she had come through, doing well enough.

"That sort is not easy to kill," was the old woman's dry comment, and her thoughts went back with fierce regret to her own young mistress who had died when Simon was born. The girl would give no account of herself, nor would she tell the name of him whom Mistress Morrison always referred to as her 'partner in sin.' "That is to say, she will not say it now she is in her right mind again." Simon looked up quickly; he was more troubled about the affair than he cared to own; it was not like Ann to turn the girl adrift unless——

"You learnt something in her ravings? if you did keep it to yourself, Eppie, and do not trouble

the girl with questions," he admonished gently. But Euphan was not to be so easily put off. "Maybe I did," she admitted, "but there is a likeness comes whiles in the hour of birth and passes but 'twill come again when the child be grown, he will be like enough his father to tell his own tale mayhap."

"Well, that will not be for some time so we may leave it at that," he silenced her; but he was relieved. If Euphan imagined a likeness it at least cleared Glenample whom she had never seen; he was content, as he said, to leave it at that.

"What was to be done with them?" Euphan demanded a week or so later. The girl would be strong enough in a few days more to go about her business.

"Has she anywhere to go?" Simon asked, and as Euphan only tossed her virtuous head, "where is your Christian charity, woman?" he asked her and, when she would have pleaded the example to the maids, bade her, with some sharpness, go read the parable of the lost sheep and not trouble him with her precious ninety and nine. So Grizzie remained in the Cave of Adullam and the baby throve exceedingly.

Euphan, having received her orders, said no more; she kept Grizzie in her own part of the house under her own eye and found her, it had to be owned, exceedingly bidable and an excellent needlewoman. Simon had almost forgotten the girl's presence when he came upon her one day carrying a bundle of linen in need of mending. She curtsied drawing aside to let him pass.

"So you are recovered?" he asked her.

"Yes, an' it please you, sir."

"And what is your mistress doing without you?"

She looked down at that and he saw her wink tears away. "My mistress turned me to the door," she said very low; "Mistress Steel, the housekeeper, reported to her my condition and many other untrue things."

"Your condition was true enough," he reminded her coldly.

"I did not deny it, sir; but it was not true that I was a danger to the household. I am neither witch nor wanton. I never gave so much as a kiss to any man in the house and that is more than most of the maids can say; but Mistress Steel hated me for that——" she hesitated, but as he waited, "I slapped the face of her husband who would have made much of me and he lied to her about me."

A female Joseph in the house of Potiphar, thought Simon; he could imagine the pompous major-domo accounting to his wife for a cheek red and stinging from Grizzie's small but capable hand.

"She said I was a gypsy." The girl's head was high now. "What if I am? (and I may be a lady for all she knows). Gypsies have better blood in them than servants such as Mistress Steel."

"And your mistress turned you out in the snow?" His tone showed his doubt for he would not believe this of Ann, but Grizzie shook her head quickly. "No, no, she would not do that; but she believed Mistress Steel, she said she would not have me in the house, but that I could go to a woman in the village with whom she had arranged for my keep; if she believed me a witch I could not stay."

"So you risked your own and your baby's life and came here. Why?"

Her head drooped again and she looked very young and forlorn. "I had nowhere to go, you had been kind to me, you saved me from that woman—I—was afraid."

Simon, manlike, gave in. "Well, well, you may stay now if Mistress Morrison can put up with you; but mind you, I will have no gypsy tricks here," he said with an attempt at severity.

In the beginning of the year the country was stirred and shocked by two events: the trial and execution, after four years' imprisonment, of James Mitchell, who nine years before had unsuccessfully attempted the assassination of Sharp; and the coming of the Highland host into the West. The first of these events caused much uncomplimentary

comment. Walter Kennedy, acting under Mr Ellis and Sir George Lockhart for the defence, burst into his sister's withdrawing room on the day doom was pronounced, his eyes blazing and his face white with excitement.

"They have condemned him," he cried, careless of the feelings of his audience. "It is a damnable business and a disgrace to law and justice."

"Sir Walter, you forget yourself," his mother reproved him haughtily; but Walter was too full of his subject to be put off. "But it is true, Madam; they had no evidence but his own withdrawn confession. You remember the case?" he turned to his brother-in-law who stood by the fire. "Four years ago Mitchell was before the Privy Council accused of shooting at the Archbishop." ("Sacrilegious and horrible," commented Lady Kennedy.) "He confessed before Rothes on promise of his life; we have a copy of the very words in the register. Sir George Lockhart's pleading yesterday was masterly, but it was on that promise we chiefly relied, and then to-day in court—it is unbelievable—Rothes, Lauderdale, Halton, and the Archbishop himself, swore no promise had been given."

"But, my dear boy, you do not take or expect us to take the word of this vile murderer before that of the four greatest gentlemen in Scotland," cried his mother, and even Ann looked her agreement, though her heart had sunk at the mention of Mitchell. He ever brought her bad luck, she thought.

"There is no question of words. We produced a copy of the Act of Council and urged that the register itself be produced."

"That should have settled it," admitted the Earl. Walter leaned forward and spoke in sepulchral tones.

"It would have, of course, but his Majesty's Advocate answered that he is not obliged to produce a register for the Panel; and if any such pretended act was there, we should have used diligence and cited the Clerks of Council for producing the register or giving an extract of the same, before the Chancellor

and others had deponed that there was no such assurance given. And then when we pressed it, his Grace Duke Lauderdale gets up and swears he is not there to be tried for perjury and so frightens the jury that they condemned the poor wretch out of hand." He got up and began to walk up and down. Lady Kennedy watched him in some agitation, Glenample shrugged his shoulders. "Well, the fellow will enjoy 'glorifying God in the Grassmarket,' as his Grace would put it; they will make a martyr of him." Lady Kennedy cried out at that. "Martyr! he is no martyr, the horrible creature did actually try to murder his Grace, and Mr Hicks, the Duke's chaplain, tells me that the behaviour in court has been dreadful and that he himself had been pelted with apples and bespattered, the women especially railing at him for his profession. I cannot understand you, Sir Walter. I suppose you must, as you are to be a lawyer, defend all sorts of persons, but one would think to hear you now that you actually sympathised with this abandoned creature!"

Walter stopped in his walk his body shaken with emotion. "So I do," he cried passionately, "after the wickedness I have seen to-day, the cruelty, the perjury. It is not murder to avenge such villainy; the Archbishop is what the women called him in court—a Judas—but he will pay for this, mark my words."

Ann's hand closed over his mouth. "Walter, Walter, cease, you stupid boy, look to our mother," she cried horrified, for Lady Kennedy had fallen back white and trembling and lay with closed eyes and hand pressed to her side.

"Look to your own neck too, you young fool," said his lordship. "God grant the servants did not hear you."

Walter, his passion dead at the sight of his mother, could only stand wringing his hands; he was conscience-stricken. "But you do not know," he kept muttering, "you do not understand what is being done in the country; the sin of it, O Lord, the sin of it all."

"If you take my advice you will send that young

man abroad or to London, and the sooner the better," Glenample told his wife when she came to him later, after seeing her mother to bed and summoning Dr Burnet. But for the moment Walter, worn out with his own emotions and shocked at what he had done, was himself ill, and when a week later he was once more able to attend the courts nothing further was said of his going away. Had Ann known what was at that moment going forward at Kells she might more readily have acquiesced in her husband's proposal.

In Ayrshire the Highlanders had behaved for all the world as if they occupied an enemy's country, plundering and distressing the unfortunate inhabitants; Galloway had listened with horror to the tales of theft, torture, and rape that had poured across the border, and had waited with dogged courage for its own turn. The Committee hoped for rebellion that they might crush it, but the time was not yet, the people endured passively though the iron seared deep. In other parts of the country, however, outcry arose and the vigorous protests of Cassilis and the Hamilton party showed the Council for once that they had gone too far; the Highlanders were recalled in February after a month of licence and returned loaded with spoil but unsuccessful; the West had neither signed the bond nor rebelled. Galloway had escaped the Highlanders but disarming went on steadily.

It was a young officer, very pleased with his first important employment, who a month or two later brought a party of soldiers to Kells and demanded arms and quarters.

"You have not taken the bond, sir?"

Kells admitted he had not; nevertheless nothing, he insisted, could be brought against his people. (He was not sorry that Reuben was not at Kells just then he having been called home to his father's death-bed.)

That, said the Lieutenant, had very little to do with it the whole West was in a state of rebellion and must be disarmed. He looked again at his commission and added condescendingly that Mr Kelston, being a gentleman of quality might possibly keep

his own sword, but that he must send out orders to his people to bring in all arms in their possession, otherwise their houses would be searched. He had himself taken the liberty, the Lieutenant went on, of sending for the servants as he wished to interrogate them as to the keeping of conventicles.

Simon, finding some difficulty in refraining from laying the young cock sparrow across his knee, watched his servants driven in. Then he demanded in cold tones if the Lieutenant was aware that his present behaviour was in direct opposition to his Majesty's orders for this household; and, as the young man stared at him in some amazement, he produced the permit by which his Majesty plainly set forth for his trusty and well-beloved Simon Kelston, etc., etc. The thing was the merest bluff, for Simon had no idea how far the permit, written more than half in jest when some Anglican bishop had ventured to suggest that young Kelston should be made to conform, would carry him through the present crisis; to his relief it acted as magic.

"But, my dear sir, of course I had no idea of this. I ask your pardon and will not trouble your household; as to the people, I fear disarming is universal and must continue; but, I assure you, I shall give you as little trouble as possible. As to your own sword, there is, of course, no question as to your keeping it."

Simon thanked him ironically. It would certainly be an unpleasant experience for a perfectly loyal man to be treated as if he were a rebel. He would also ask for his body-servant the permission to retain the sword he had used in the King's defence at Worcester, "Before you, sir, were born." The Lieutenant was all complaisance.

"But you talk of loyalty, sir, you would hardly believe how hard it is to find it. I have with me papers found in a desk not far from here, in the house of a young gentleman who should have known better, seeing his father, I am told, was out with Montrose and he himself a Conformist—S'blood! that is a good-looking wench, sir." Simon, following the

soldier's look, saw Grizzie's golden head dropped demurely as she followed Euphan's stately tread.

"Are you in the habit of rifling the houses of Conformist gentlemen?" he asked, taking no notice of the last remark. The other laughed. "If we suspect them we can do what we like. The curate of the parish warned us that all was not well at Pulquhanity, but I doubt if he guessed what a hornet's nest I have here." He tapped his pocket, and Simon, watching Grizzie, saw her half turn, giving the Lieutenant a startled look as she passed out.

"Yes, a dam' good-looking wench," the young man repeated and again Simon's hand itched to administer suitable chastisement.

As the Lieutenant had not dined, Kelston ordered his refreshment, but excused himself; he could not bring himself to eat with this insufferable youth who was despoiling his house. He would not leave the hall while his people brought in their small stores of arms; it was a humiliating business, but less so for them if he was there to share it with them, for his presence kept the sergeant more civil.

As the dreary afternoon sped on his mind left its own troubles to dwell more and more upon Walter; possibly the Lieutenant, pleased with his own importance, had exaggerated the boy's offence. Simon found it difficult to believe that Walter could have seriously compromised himself, but he had learnt all too well how great a fire the smallest indiscretion could kindle under the present Government and for Ann's sake he was the more troubled. What could he do? He wondered for a moment if the Lieutenant could be bribed but decided against an attempt which, if it failed, could only make matters worse. Glenample must get the youth out of the country if the thing were really serious; it would break his mother's heart if any disloyalty was proved and prison would make short work of Walter.

At last the miserable business was over. The Lieutenant, strolling into the hall, was contemptuous of the ancient pistols, whingers, and fowling-pieces

piled in its centre. Simon left him to make what arrangements he chose for removing the spoils, but as he made for the stair, meaning to go to his own chamber, he was stopped by a voice from Euphan's quarters and the sound of some one in pain.

"Out of this house you go, baggage, taking your bastard with you. I have put up with you long enough but this is too much. 'Christian charity,' quoth 'a. You think because he is a gentleman and a soft-hearted one at that you can take advantage of him, going about like a dove for simplicity, till even I began to think you an innocent who had been put upon; and all the while you were but biding your time to bubble us, and with his veriest enemies too—you thankless, hypocritical, good-for-nothing." Again came the sound of a blow. Simon opened the door and found Grizzie on her knees, held there by Euphan's strong hand while with the other the woman belaboured her with a stout birch rod. David, pipe in mouth, stood by watching the punishment with unruffled composure.

"Are you mad, woman," Simon demanded sternly, and caught the upraised arm. Euphan turned on him fiercely. It seemed that now her ire was roused the usually quiet woman had found her tongue. "Leave be, Kells she deserves all she has got, and more, a sneaking, polluted creature. Div ye ken whaur she's been all this afternoon? Sitting on the knees of yon ungodly, malignant youth, the man who insulted you, her protector; but what cares she for that."

"Aye, ye mun own that is an ugly accusation," said David, "and Euphan is no one to say what she cannot prove."

"I can prove it weel eneuch," Euphan answered. "I saw her with my own eyes daffing and laughing, and fondling him the while, the shameless besom; but she can go with him now, a camp follower is all she is fit for."

Simon looked at Grizzie and continued to look, for as she lay crouched where Euphan had flung her, it

was triumph rather than shame that looked out from under her heavy lids, although her face was grey and contracted with pain.

"This is still my house, Mistress, though to-day's happening may well have made you forget it," Kelston said more coldly than he had ever before spoken to Euphan. "Lock the girl in her room if she be misbehaving; to-morrow I will hear both your complaints, but do not touch her again without my leave. You can go, Gourlay," and looking at none of them he went out too sick at heart to argue further.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Lieutenant kept his word in so far that, the disarming over, he removed himself and his men quickly; perhaps he was somewhat ashamed of the part he had played all afternoon, perhaps he was merely anxious to carry his news to headquarters without delay. At any rate before nightfall the soldiers were gone and peace reigned once more.

Sitting in his grandfather's chair next morning Simon held court upon Grizzie; he had listened without comment to Euphan's story, then he sent for the girl. She stood before him now with hands folded and eyes on the ground, the picture of respectful decorum.

"Mistress Morrison brings an accusation of wanton unseemliness against you. Have you aught to say in your own defence?" he asked her.

"Mistress Morrison is like the rest; because I have a bad name she thinks the worst of me, she——" He stopped her with an impatient gesture.

"That is enough. I do not ask your opinion upon Mistress Morrison, but if you have anything to say for yourself——"

She looked up swiftly and there was appeal below her defiance.

"Do you suppose I could have aught to say? Would you believe my defence?"

He met her look dispassionately. He knew that Euphan hard though she might be was just, she would not exaggerate her tale by a hand's breadth, and her tale had been ugly enough; yet something in the tragic unwavering eyes that searched his, something, too, in his own heart forbade condemnation.

"Yes, I shall believe you," he said quietly. She dropped on her knees, caught his hand and kissed it before he could prevent her, then springing up she drew from her breast a packet of papers and with a certain queenliness of gesture laid them before him.

He looked at the packet and then quickly at her, and his look was full of amazement. She stood once more in her attitude of meek servitude, but now her face was alight, amusement, mischief, and triumph chased each other in her eyes.

"He has carried away blank papers wrapped about with his own ribbon, the fool! Oh, but I would I could have writ names upon them, such names as the Archbishop's and his Grace, but, alas, I cannot write."

"How did you get these; they were in his inner pocket?"

She opened her mouth to answer him, then stopped, her head a little on one side her hand raised warningly.

"Is that not the sound of horses; can the soldiers be returning?" Her face was full of anxiety, she took a quick step to the window and he followed more leisurely; he could hear nothing. "Are they there?" she asked shrinking. Still he could hear nothing but leaned out to satisfy her, for a moment they were very near together in the deep recess of the window. Then he turned to her frowning, and more than ever perplexed. "There is no one there," he said, and then with an oath, "How did you get that?" he cried and caught the small case she was holding out to him.

"From your inner pocket, it is not difficult when one has learnt young; *she* taught me, I had to do it for her. I have never touched anything of yours, but I wished you to see how I got those papers and

—I knew you carried that always. He will never suspect.”

“No, on my life! I do not believe he will.” He did not wonder that Euphan thought her a witch.

“And he will not bring accusations against Sir Walter with nothing to prove them,” she was saying. “He will not say the papers were stolen, because he will be ashamed.” Simon looked at her again, and this time there was unwilling admiration in his eyes; the girl was shrewd he thought.

“Are the papers very dangerous?” she asked him. He turned them over; there were a couple of letters signed “Robert Hamilton”, a list of names presumably banded for some service, a paper of reasons against signing the bond, and one or two others which his hurried glance showed to be of a questionable nature.

“Certain I think it will be of benefit to Sir Walter that these be not laid before the Privy Council,” he said gravely.

The girl clapped her hands, her face radiant.

“Natheless, stealing is a grave sin, my dear,” he admonished her in a belated effort to do his duty by this abandoned young woman. But Grizzie shrugged unconcernedly. “’Twas he stole,” she told him, “I but took away what was not his.” And Simon, too grateful to enquire more closely into the morality of the affair, dismissed her with a laugh.

Mr Kelston had long ago induced Reuben to communicate with his people, but little intercourse had followed until some two weeks before Grizzie’s advent, when he had been summoned to attend upon his father who, having had a stroke, was not expected to live.

Reuben had gone meaning to return quickly; but weeks had passed into months and the old man lingered on, and when at last death came there were affairs to discuss and his mother, who alone of the family sympathised with her youngest son, would not let him go lest in absence his rights were overlooked. It was spring, therefore, before Reuben crossed the

Forth once more and made his way south. In spite of his mother's secret sympathy his visit had not been a happy one, his efforts to show his family the error of its ways being unappreciated by its members. So that it was with little regret that he turned his steps towards Kells, and once across Ken he spurred his pony to the steep ascent, eager for the turn in the road which would bring him in sight of the Tower he now looked upon as his home.

He had just reached it when an unexpected vision made him draw rein with a wondering exclamation. Under a birch tree, crooning softly, her head bent over a baby which she was rocking in her arms, sat Grizzie. At his cry she looked up and under her black brows her eyes shone like stars.

"Oh, Grizzie, how bonny you are!" he exclaimed in involuntary admiration, and he sat still gazing at her as if he could not look enough. The light had died from her eyes at sight of him, but at his open admiration she smiled faintly, appraising him with her shadowed eyes.

"You are not so bad-looking yourself, Reuben; on weekdays, that is, when you forget to pull your face lengthwise. I cannot abide your Sabbath face." She drew her own out turning her eyes heavenwards, so that he must needs laugh at her, though he disapproved her mockery.

"Is her ladyship at Pulquhanity?" he asked; and as she shook her head, "Whose baby is that you've got in your shawl, lass?"

Her arms tightened about the infant and her brows drew together. "Mine," she answered him shortly.

"Yours?" Halket's head reeled so that he caught at the saddle to steady himself. "Yours?" he whispered; and in an agony, "You are married, Grizzie?"

She shook her head, still glooming at him. Passion seized on Halket. Flinging himself from the pony he advanced to her, white-faced and shaken. "Who is the man?" he demanded, "Who is the scoundrel? Tell me his name, Grizzie woman, I say, tell me his

name." He caught her by the shoulder looking down at her with burning eyes, but Grizzie did not stir; she was not afraid of Reuben, only a little excited to find him so moved.

"What is that to you?" She asked coolly, but he shook her shoulder impatiently.

"It is everything to me," he cried, "I—I could kill him. Grizzie, you are mine, mine. I shall kill the thief that has stolen ye."

Later the sin and shame would torment him; at the moment he could see nothing but this white girl, feel nothing but his own mad jealousy of the man who had done what he had never dared. "Oh, Grizzie, Grizzie," he sobbed, and suddenly he took his hands from her shoulders and covered his face. The girl surveyed him with some contempt and a certain curiosity.

"You are a queer one," she said at last, "'yours,' am I? yours? You will need to find chapter and verse for that I'm thinking, Mr Halket. You might not marry with the daughter of an Egyptian you told me. S'blood, 'twas my soul you always seemed to hanker for, you'd have let my body burn to save that, I'm thinking."

"'Tis my own is burning now," he said very low his face still hidden. "God's mercy, God His mercy," and he rocked himself back and forward. Then almost as quickly as it had come his passion sank and falling on his knees he began to pray quietly and humbly—he prayed for himself and for Grizzie, he prayed for the unknown man who had sinned against her as well as against God, and lastly he prayed, not without sweetness, for the innocent, offended babe.

Grizzie, her red lips drooping to a pout, listened with an ever-increasing annoyance; but when he began to pray for the babe she stopped him with flaming anger.

"Do not do that," she cried. "Do not give Him my baby. He would not take my baby, I tried; I thought on what you had said, and I would have had him christened, it was right for he is a gentleman, but *He*

would not. The minister must know his father, or else I must repent me and learn and join the kirk."

"Aye, that's but right, there must be some one to take the vows for the poor babe," he said; and added, "but it is as well; Mr Cant is a good man, I am not saying otherwise, but he should not have accepted the Indulgence. The babe should be christened by one who has never sunk to these Erastian ways. The Lord is calling you, lassie; we'll have the poor wean baptised into His true Remnant." Grizzie stirred uneasily, wearied as ever when Reuben rode his hobby. Suddenly he broke off to ask—"But where are you living if my lady is not at Pulquhanity?"

She looked at him sidelong, watching the effect of her answer. "At Kells House," quoth she.

"Kells House?" he repeated stupidly, "Kells House? How came ye there?" Wild thoughts, unbelievable thoughts chased themselves through his mind, and enjoying his agitation she shrugged her shoulder. "Where else should I be?" she enquired. And then as he still gazed at her troubled in spirit and not daring to put into words the fears that her answer had aroused, she cried out impatiently;

"Oh, you are as great a fool as ever, I do perceive. Surely you, of all people, should know Mr Kelston to be one to succour all desolate folk; you should think shame to yourself for not knowing that I could get no harm from him."

He blushed hotly, stung by her contempt, but his honesty owned her justice.

"'Deed you speak truth," he said humbly, "but oh! lassie, I am so put about I do not rightly know what I am doing."

Her eyes had left him and were once more searching the glen. "Well, you'd best be getting on," she said indifferently; and as he still lingered, "no, I am not coming yet awhile; but I am not running away either, you will see me again never fear." And then with yet another change of mood, "And Reuben, if you can get my bairn the holy water, you—you can kiss me, Reuben," said she.

About three miles from Kells, on the other side of the valley, the Garpol burn flows through a wooded hollow on its way to join the Ken. Farther up where the glen narrows and becomes steeper the water falls into a natural basin or fount, and here, well hidden from view in a fold of the moors, it had become the custom of those country-folk whose consciences forbade all truckling to Erastianism to bring their infants for baptism at the hands of some outed but faithful minister.

Here some three weeks after Halket's return to Kells a number of people were assembled, for Mr Welsh, a more than usually noted preacher, had taken his life in his hands to come to their aid, and many had taken advantage of the occasion to bring their children.

Here also came Reuben Halket, bringing with him Grizzie the gypsy, that they two being united in marriage he might then stand sponsor to her babe.

It had not been without much heart searching that Reuben had taken this momentous step. His passion for Grizzie had long been held in check by the canny good sense which told him unanswerably that she was no fit mate for him ; but now shame for her shame drew from him something more chivalrous than either passion or convenience. As was his habit when in doubt, he had betaken himself to what might be termed the conversational method in prayer so dear to many among the Covenanters ; praying earnestly for guidance he had been perplexed to find his Bible opening at the 23rd chapter of Deuteronomy, commencing with the statement that a bastard might not enter into the congregation of the Lord. That this referred to Grizzie's infant was clear ; but he was half fearful that it might mean only another refusal of the said infant as a child of grace, until further wrestlings brought him to the command given to Hosea the prophet to take to himself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom. Here surely was no room for doubt ; he was to save Grizzie as Hosea had saved his woman. It could mean nothing else.

To Grizzie's darkened soul the matter was not so simple, but Halket's enthusiasm was infectious and in spite of Simon's commands, life under Euphan's will was none too easy. Above all, at the back of her mind lay the ever-present dread of the witch woman; without the holy water she felt the babe to be unsafe. There was proud humility in Grizzie's attitude to her child; he was something superior to herself; she was willing to sacrifice herself in any way so he might have all the advantages of more fortunate children. If Halket had hesitated in offering marriage to one as lowly as Grizzie, Grizzie hesitated in accepting so humble a father for her lordly babe, and in the end it was fear of the woman that overcame her doubts.

She stood with Reuben at the back of the crowd, her baby tightly wrapped in her shawl, her eyes watching jealously as infant after infant was held up by its lawful sire at this woodland font. The minister's words passed over her head unheard, but the sign which signed them from fear of the Devil and his ministers was noted by her with eager interest. Reuben gave her hand a little squeeze. "Bide here," he said, and went forward as the service drew to a close. "I'll go speak with him now." He moved nearer, and the service over stepped to the minister's side before he could depart and proffered his request. The minister knew Halket as did several of those present, and now leading him aside he listened to his tale and put to him certain pertinent questions. The congregation had begun to disperse but some lingered. Then the minister, raising his voice, spoke so that those about him could hear.

"And you, Reuben Halket, solemnly declare that though the child be none of yours your desire is to unite yourself with its mother in holy wedlock, and having done so, to adopt her infant and to take upon you the vows of a parent towards it?"

"I do," said Reuben Halket.

"Bring forward the young woman that we may speak with her," said the minister, and Halket turned to obey.

"I'll fetch her, sir," he said and went back; but Grizzie was not to be seen. He knew the exact spot upon which he had left her but she must have moved; affronted at her caprice and not a little anxious, he called her, looking about. Such of the congregation as were left had been watching him, no one had noticed the girl. Then an older child who, tired of the long service, had climbed into the fork of a tree, slipped to the ground. "Is it yon girl wi' the blue shawl ye are speirin' for?" he asked, "the one a gentleman was speaking to?" "What gentleman?" cried poor Reuben in great agitation, "there was no one with her but me."

"Oh, but there was; the minute you'd gone he came up and plucked her by the sleeve. He was awful excited and whispered to her, and then she nodded and they slipped awa' thegither and climbed the bank ower yonder."

"Who was he?" cried several voices, but that the boy could not say, only when pressed he thought maybe he was one of the armed gentlemen who had come with the minister.

Simon, returning home early the following morning after a night spent with his shepherd in the hills, asked for Grizzie. He had brought home a sick lamb and the girl had a strange way with all beasts.

Grizzie had gone, Euphan told him, and added details of what had happened, Reuben having returned far too disturbed to keep the story to himself.

"I cannot say but the young man has had an escape," was her dry comment.

"The young man, maybe, but what of the girl?"

Euphan's face expressed indifference; but under her master's grave eyes her own dropped. He carried the lamb on his shoulders, a strayed lamb that had been hurt; the remembrance of that other Shepherd knocked at Euphan's heart, making her ashamed.

"She was handy with the beasts," she muttered, having no answer to his question.

He nodded. "Yes, a hurt thing understanding

hurt things; that is why I brought this one home. We have nothing to be proud of in this matter, Eppie," he added as she took the lamb from him.

He thought her hard and was not inclined to spare her, but her answer took him by surprise.

"You speak truer than ye know, Kells," she said very low. "I think I have been jealous of the bairn, I, an old woman who never had bairn of my own—jealous of a wanton—that is a humbling sin to take to heart." She turned from him, carrying the lamb in her strong old arms. At the door she halted and spoke again, half over her shoulder. "Natheless, I went to Pulquhanity myself last night to bring her back if she would come, but the door was just shut in my face." And with that she left him.

Some days later Halket came to Mr Kelston, stern resolve in his face.

"Sir, may I have private word with you?" Simon put down a book of French verse with which he was whiling away a wet afternoon. "There appears to be now no one present but ourselves; speak on," said he and composed his face to a becoming gravity. He had not by word or sign shown knowledge of Halket's misadventure, nor had Reuben spoken of it, though his haggard face and depressed spirits had told plainly enough that all was not well. Simon supposed he was now to suffer a recital, probably lengthy, of the affair, and he was quite unprepared for Reuben's abrupt statement.

"Sir, I must leave your service."

"Eh?" ejaculated his master, sitting up. Then pointing to a stool, "Sit down, man, and take your time." For Halket's composure was at breaking-point; he steadied himself, however, and went on.

"For one thing, sir, you pay me wages I do not earn, for of late you have corresponded so little that my work has been merely of my own finding; yet this, though I have put it first, is a secondary matter, for I would willingly forgo my wages in order to remain. I am, however, not only useless to you, but a danger. Persecution increaseth and sooner or

later questions must arise as to my non-attendance at church. Had I been at home (for indeed this seems to me as 'home') at the last visitation of soldiers I must needs have protested against the unlawful pressing of the bond as, also, your own Erastian use of the King's permit. You have been more than generous to me, Mr Kelston; I should ill repay that generosity by bringing trouble upon you; but even this is not all——" he hurried on as Simon waved away the suggestion of danger to himself. "I have, while I have been a member of your household, having much time upon my hands, studied in both Theology and Divinity, yet I have shrunk from the call which I felt coming to me, preferring the flesh-pots of Egypt, fearing with cowardly terror the hardships and dangers of the desert. Like Moses I have cried out: '*O Lord, I am not eloquent; neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant: but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue*'; but the Lord has answered me as He did His great servant: '*Who hath made man's mouth? Have not I, the Lord?*' Even so I have lingered, pleading my unworthiness, deafening myself with arguments of humility; but I can no longer shut my ears to the Voice that calls me; unworthy I am, unworthy I must always be. His strength is made perfect in weakness."

He paused a moment for breath, and Simon seized the opportunity to inquire what he meant to do. He had, Reuben explained, long felt himself called to the ministry of the oppressed Kirk; he had even consulted with Mr Welsh and another outed minister, and now this very day they had consented to speak for him to others, that at the earliest opportunity he might undergo his trials and if thought worthy be licensed to preach.

"Have you spoken of this to Mr Cant?" Simon asked him, for he perceived Halket was already beyond argument. The young man shook his head.

"For Mr Cant I have much admiration and affection; but I cannot admit the jurisdiction of

any who have so forgotten the honour of Christ's Kirk as to accept from secular authority what is the Kirk's alone to give."

Simon frowned, this attitude of Reuben's always annoyed him. The men who brought disunion upon the Kirk when every division was so eagerly encouraged by her enemies seemed to him to be doing her the greater disservice; but to say so now would only involve further dissertation, and for all his secretary's intolerance there was a real heroism in his renunciation which could not but appeal to his master.

"This will mean the hills, Reuben; Mr Welsh is already intercommuned and branded a traitor."

"I know it. Oh, sir! I know it; I fear it so much that only His strength can uphold me. Oh, my dear master, I would not leave you if I dared stay."

Simon made one more effort, probing deep. "There was a certain happening we both wot of the other evening; you are certain this desire to be gone ariseth not from what is maybe a painful memory?"

Halket flushed but his eyes met Kelston's frankly. "I wondered that too, sir," he owned, "for indeed I was much humbled. But though in one sense it is true that it has settled my indecision it is not in the way you mean, but only that through it I see more clearly how my fear of the call seized as it were any means to misinterpret it. I would save Grizzie, poor lass, I would do the noble thing by her child, I thought myself a fine fellow when in truth I was but a coward and contemptible. The Lord has shown me plainly my presumption. It was not Gomer that Hosea was sent to save, she was but a symbol; Israel it was who had gone a-whoring. So it is to-day in Scotland; it is Scotland. I must wed if I would take a wife of whoredom: the Kirk has gone a-whoring after kings and bishops. It is with the Kirk I must plead—plead lest the Lord 'strip her naked as in the day she was born, and make her as a wilderness and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst'."

He was fairly launched and Simon was inclined to

remind him that he was not yet licensed, had not the sight of his white face and the remembrance of his late humiliation softened his heart and caused him to bear the flow of his secretary's eloquence as patiently as might be until Morrison, coming to announce supper, permitted his escape.

Simon was interested to find that Will, indeed most of the household, sympathised with Halket. Even Mr Cant, he discovered, had been expecting this step. "I have known for some time that he was seeing Mr Welsh and was much influenced by this young Mr Cameron who is with him. I have spoken to Mr Welsh on his behalf, for I believe him to be an earnest, pious young man; but I would fain he went not with Mr Cameron, who seems to me to be more as one of the Sectaries in his views than a licentiate of the Kirk, he hardly owning any authority; yet Mr Welsh speaks well of his true piety and Christian spirit, so mayhap I misjudge him."

"It is as well," commented Kelston dryly, "that I am not commissioner for Kirkeudbright, for truly there would seem to be considerable traffic with the intercommuned going on under my innocent nose."

Mr Cant smiled. "I fear that is true," he agreed, but added more gravely, that even at the sacrifice of his indulgence, he must needs meet with his brethren. "When," he added sadly, "they will still own and countenance me, which young Mr Cameron and his fellows do more and more urge should not be done."

So Reuben went and Simon was surprised to find how much he missed him; the fellow had, he knew, added to his amusement, but he had also, he found, grown into his affection.

CHAPTER XIV

It was some time before word came from Pulquhanity, though rumour was rife enough and it was not long before the countryside knew that Sir Walter Kennedy had carried off Grizzel the gypsy girl, one time serving-

maid at Garryford, and had set her up as mistress in his mother's house at Pulquhanity.

Simon, strolling round his garden one fine morning and discussing with William some plans for its improvement, noted a sudden stiffening in his steward's manner and, turning, saw Walter, rod in hand. The young man's air of elaborate unconcern only made him appear the more self-conscious.

"I am spending a few weeks at Pulquhanity," he said as Simon went to meet him.

"So I understand," said Mr Kelston. Walter looked at him quickly, and Simon was struck afresh with his extraordinary good looks. He still looked a child too for all his twenty-two years, and the older man's face softened.

"My dear lad, do you suppose all the country-side does not know of your doings, or that I, living in the same house with David Gourlay, could fail to know them too?"

Walter, whose face had grown a trifle sulky, laughed uneasily. But ignoring his embarrassment, Simon went on gravely. "I am glad you have come, for I have documents of yours would be safest in ashes, but I prefer you should have the destroying of them." He led the way into the house and to his own apartment; there, from a secret drawer in the cabinet, he took the papers Grizzie had stolen and handed them to Walter. The young man glanced over their contents and then at Simon. "How came you to have these?" he asked, startled; Simon explained. "She? *She stole them back?*" Sir Walter asked ignoring the more euphemistic "retook" of Kelston's explanation; it was difficult to know if he were grateful or shocked.

"For your sake," Simon reminded him, "you owe her gratitude for that; and, by the way," he added as Walter still stood glooming over the papers, "do you not owe me an apology for your own theft?"

"Theft?"

"Yes, the young woman was in the care of my housekeeper, she is removed from her charge and no explanation given."

Walter's eyes dropped. "Euphan was over righteous with her," he muttered. "As for Halket, that marriage was impossible."

"And your right to interfere?"

Walter looked up again. "The boy is mine," he said, and the wonder of it was still in his eyes. "My boy," he repeated. "He is a fine bairn," the last with a shade of defiance.

"Possibly, I am not an authority."

"But you do see that it is my duty to protect his mother?"

Kelston's gently ironic expression gave way to gravity once more. "If she be in need of protection, certainly; you have done the girl a wrong, though I doubt not she knew what she did as well as you, and maybe a little better; but to make her the talk of the neighbourhood is neither wise for her sake nor your own."

"I have offered her marriage," Walter said abruptly, and then with a return to petulance, "'tis she will not."

"She shows her sense there," Kelston answered involuntarily, for the thought of Grizzie as Ann's good-sister was not pleasant. He had no intention of discussing the matter further, however; Walter was of age and must manage his domestic arrangements himself; Simon's own upbringing had been too lax to allow of his assuming the scandalised attitude of his household, nor could he regard Grizzie as an innocent victim. He was at the moment more troubled by Walter's political outlook, and this, in turn, Walter could not or would not discuss. He was ready enough to burn the papers, obviously frightened by the narrowness of his escape, but too much under Hamilton's influence to be moved by other arguments. He had done nothing against the government, he insisted, but owned he had been more than once at preachings with Hamilton's armed band. "There is no rebellion about it: they go but to protect the minister. Mr Welsh was an ordained and placed minister; he was turned out for no fault but by the

arbitrary act of an unscrupulous government. You, who call yourself a Presbyterian, cannot deny his right to preach, yet he can preach only at the risk of his life." This was shrewd enough hitting. Simon, owning himself touched, fell back on his old argument; Walter at least was not a Presbyterian. But he was answered that this would not long be the case. "I intend to become one; I hope to be admitted at the next Communion, for I am determined to be done with Prelacy."

"How much of this does Ann know?" Simon asked aghast.

"Nothing. She has been at Glenample all winter. Any gait Ann should look to herself. I do not approve the way Sir Cuthbert Moule is for ever about Glenample; what his feelings are any fool can see."

But at that Simon's wrath boiled over and Walter was glad to escape with a hasty explanation and assurance that he meant nothing, could mean nothing against his sister.

It was early autumn, the sad season as some think it, when summer is over and there is a snell nip in the wind that betokens winter's approach; but to Simon there was nothing sad about the time when the bracken was turning, the rowans scarlet, and patches of late heather still upon the hills. He had been busy helping where he could with such harvest as these uplands made possible; but on this day he was on holiday and, with some oaten cakes of Euphan's making and a couple of eggs boiled hard enough to carry in his pocket, he was striding along over the lower reaches of the Rhinns on his way to the heights of Meikle Millyea.

The News Letter had come that day and with it another letter from Nelly; the news they bore was disquieting, for there was in them talk of papist plots and schemes for poisoning the King. The News Letter was full of accusations and horrified desire for vengeance; Nelly made light of the whole matter, though openly rejoiced at the trouble it was like to bring to

de K roualle. 'My coach was stopped at Oxford by a hooting rabble, but on my putting forth my head and telling 'em I was the *Protestant* whore, they let me go amid cheeres,' she told him ; and later, 'Charles sends his love, but when I ask him to have you back he says 'No' for the Court is grown too naughty for you ; Tom Bruce hath your place. I am sorry for I do love you, Sim, but indeed, between the French and Italian, the Court is truly no better than the playhouse and mighty dreary to boot.' Across the distance Simon could hear Charles's careless voice, 'Send him love if you wish to, my dear ; but no, no, we cannot have him back,' and then would follow that little impatient shrug of his shoulders as if to throw off memories he had striven to forget. Madame's death, Simon's own mutilation, yes, these things had troubled him and he hated to be troubled ; poor Charles. But this business of the Popish Plot ; surely the King, himself a Catholic at heart, could not let it go on, could not let innocent men perish ? Coleman, the Duke's secretary, was involved, 'twas said ; Simon remembered Coleman before he had that post, a stupid fellow but incapable of the wickedness foisted upon him.

Simon shivered and pressed on, the clean pure scent of the bog myrtle driving away the imaginary perfumes of Whitehall. He was in excellent training and the ascent was on the whole gradual, only one must be wary of bogs. About him the moss lay in patches of every shade, from palest emerald to the deep orange and scarlets of the sphagnum more than ever brilliant against the black of the peat bogs, with here and there a clump of purple still glowing among the withered heather. Below him the Minnigall and the Garrary flowed down to join the Dee, a silver ribbon across the moor of bronze and gold. Simon climbed on enjoying the exercise ; filling his lonely heart with the beauty about him and letting the crisp winds disperse his anxiety. On the top the air blew shrill enough over a tableland of heather ; crossing it he sat down in the shelter of a rock awed by the magnificent panorama of mountain, river, and loch

which lay all about him. From here the Millyea fell away sharply to where far below he could see the dark Cauldron of the Dungeon with its grey lochs, an awesome place walled in by the rocky sides of Craignaw and the Merrick Range beyond. Letting his eyes rove he caught his breath for at its head, beyond a cleft in the hills where the sky was clear beneath a bank of clouds, rose palely blue the pinnacles of a fairy kingdom—the Isle of Arran he learnt later—but at the moment it might well have been the Isle of Avalon where Arthur dreams at peace. To his left Loch Dee lay like some great kite, plaything of a giant child, the curling river for its tail; and higher among the hills Grennoch, and beyond a gleam of far-off water from Luce Bay or the Cree, he knew not which.

The grim fastness of the Dungeon turned his thoughts to Reuben; this would be a dread place indeed of a winter night, nay of summer's day even, for the sun could but seldom illumine the waters of that deep ravine. He had heard little of Reuben of late though he knew he had passed his trials and been duly licensed to preach, and tales had reached him from time to time of field meetings at which his late secretary's eloquence had impressed his hearers; but up to now Reuben had had the courtesy to refrain from meetings in Mr Cant's parish.

The thought of him brought Simon to the review of his own position; he had been fortunate, coming as he had to a parish where he could live in peace—more or less at peace, that was, for indeed it became harder and harder to avoid the assaults of a government whose aim really seemed to be the driving of all Presbyterian folk into open rebellion. Suppose the Indulgence, so much more indulgent in name than in reality, was withdrawn or made impossible and the county faced with a final choice, what would he do? That Presbyterianism was the one and only form of Church government he was not prepared to admit; that it had as good a claim as any other he believed heartily and added to that belief the con-

viction that, of all others, it was the one which suited best the mind and temper of the nation. Sitting here looking down upon a scene filled with the tales of Bruce and the war of liberty and nationality, Simon was forced to the conclusion that his people could not be driven; persecuted, bent they might be, broken even, as Bruce had seemed broken when he escaped with hardly a follower down this same fastness, where still a few gnarled old trees told of the forest that once had been; but the broken remnant would rise again and fight on even as Bruce had fought. And he? What side must he choose, he who was a King's man? Again rose that picture of Charles's dark, sarcastic face as he bent over some letter of Louis; and once again he saw it as he had seen it last, when in bitter anger he had rushed back from the sight of de K  roualle's shrinking form to accuse the King of having broken Madame's last trust to him. Charles would never forgive him that, perhaps rightly, for he had said unforgivable things most like; maddened by pain and grief and the shock of this crowning unfaithfulness, truths that no subject should utter had escaped him then. Natheless, he was, and must always be, Charles's man; only, in matter of one's conscience—He got up suddenly, his eye caught by a gleam far below. The sun was glinting on something that moved, moved slowly but regularly along the old track that crossed the moorland from Minnigaff. The bayonets of soldiers? Yes, damn them, soldiers hunting and harrying some of his unfortunate countrymen. Yes, he, Simon Kelston, was a King's man, but the people had rights too, and in this matter of the Church the King's Government, ruling in the King's name, had gone beyond what was tolerable; a man's conscience was his own, and he for one would worship God after the manner of his fathers nor change for any man's telling.

It was towards evening when Simon came down by the Pulquhanity Burn on his way home; he could, he calculated, get there before dusk and supper was

beginning to be once more a pleasant prospect. Suddenly at a turn of the path he came to a halt, three or four horses blocking the way. Sir Walter, it seemed, had guests. The next instant a well-known voice cried his name in accents of unmistakable relief. "Simon," and then hurriedly, "Mr Kelston."

"Why, my lady!" said he, and moved to her side. She sat erect on her strong little Galloway horse, her head held high, but there was a glint of tears behind her pride.

"My lord is in London with Duke Hamilton," she said, speaking low; "my mother is in Edinburgh; I had not heard of Walter for so long that I feared him ill; and I was tired, tired of the green Borders. I wanted my own hills. I had had sad news from London and I thought I would come home." The word slipped out unnoticed by her. "Oh, Simon, did you know of this?"

Simon nodded shamefacedly. "You found your late maid ensconced in state? but surely——"

"Walter is not here," she broke in. "She says he has gone to town but that is not true; she is hiding something. She is living here for all the world as if she were his wife; she would have rooms prepared for me, forsooth! She——" Ann stopped, anger choking her. "I will not sleep under that roof; she has polluted it."

Somewhere in the depth of Simon's heart rose a faint sympathy for Grizzie, but all he said was, "Best come to Kells, my lady; we can surely make shift to give you some sort of comfort." He looked round her retinue and picked out a Galloway lad whom he knew, had indeed recommended to her service. "Ride on as quick as may be to Kells, M'Feterick, and tell Mistress Morrison to prepare the dais chamber and make supper ready. She will be a proud woman this night, my lady."

"You come as ever to my need," said she under her breath and let him lead her on.

They supped in the Hall, with her retinue at the lower table. The food needed no apology. It seemed

to Simon that in the hour they had had in which to prepare William must have searched the house for his possessions; he had no idea that Kells could show so fine an array of silver and pewter. That the display would make little impression on a company accustomed to the gold plate of Glenample he was well aware, but the effort of his household to uphold his honour touched while it amused him, and even Glenample, he thought with a faint satisfaction, could produce no finer wine.

She told him of the death of Margaret Blagge, of which she had but now had word and which had greatly saddened her. "Though if anyone was ready for death surely it was she, but poor Mr Godolphin, her husband, is broken-hearted, and my heart aches for the babe she has left." Simon in turn told her all he knew of Walter and Grizzel, piecing it together out of hints the boy had at times let drop. It had come as a complete surprise to Ann, who had not even remembered that it was Walter who had engineered her acceptance of Grizzel; she was bitterly humiliated, inclined even to blame Simon for sheltering the girl, but in the next moment owned herself unjust. About Water's views, political and religious, she seemed less troubled than he, perhaps realising less of the danger. The effect on her mother was her greatest concern.

"I think the execution of Mr Mitchell upset him, though why, seeing the man was really a murderer in intention if nothing worse, I cannot see. Yes, I know the trial was unfair but Walter need not have taken it so much to heart; he is a strange boy, always hath been. Sir Cuthbert has more than once tried to warn him, I think, and my lord has been sharp with him at times, but it avails nothing; but if he carries out this threat of becoming a Presbyterian it will break my mother's heart."

"Have you seen Sir Cuthbert of late?" he asked her, and dropped his eyes to the fire that he might not see her blush.

"Yes, he is a faithful friend," she answered him, with a little emphasis on the 'faithful' that clearly

pointed at himself. He accepted the reproof. "But I am not permitted to come to the capital," he reminded her.

"We are not always in Edinburgh," she retorted, and added, "but how absurd it is, Simon, you of all people."

"I dare say they would make no difficulty now; but I own to disliking going hat in hand to the bishops for permission, and indeed I am best at Kells."

"Which means you care not to be anywhere else, I trow, sir," she laughed, "and I do not blame you; there are nights——" She paused and went on quickly, "my husband has been in ill-health of late; there are nights when sleep is impossible, and at such times when I sit with him my thoughts turn often to Pulquhanity and the days when Walter and I were bairns. Oh! and now it is all spoilt," she cried in sudden remembrance.

"Do you remember the first time you spoke to me of Kells in the Stewartry?" he asked to take her mind off her trouble. "And I thought of it as a great place?" "Yes, and you remembered best the smell of hot bannocks in the kitchen," she mocked him, but unashamed he replied he found it a very pleasant smell still.

"And the Hanging Tree——" She stopped, the laughter gone from her eyes. "Simon, what has happened to the Hanging Tree?"

"It fell in the great hurricane this August." Then as her eyes widened in sudden fear, "Is it the old rhyme you are thinking on?"

*'Gin the hingin' tree gaes doon the brae
Kells House mun cease ere mony a day,'*

he quoted, smiling at her. "You are not such a pagan as to be troubled over an auld wife's tale?"

"I know it is foolish, but—I wish it had not fallen," she whispered.

"You are as doited as Euphan," he told her. "I would have had the tree down when I first came home, for I hated the sight of it and the sound of its

branches on a winter night, but Euphan would not, and it was to distress her so greatly that I let it be ; I thought it had something to do with Sandy but afterwards I found the rhyme. Poor Euphan, she would have liked to see bairns about Kells House, I trow well." Then he raised his eyes from the glowing logs and looked at Ann, frankly but with a certain shy wistfulness. "Tree or no tree, I am the last of the line and I shall not marry now, I think ; there was a time maybe when I might have done so, but I was a fool and blind. I thought I was a poor maimed fellow, not seeing my good fortune, and now that time has passed."

She sat with her hands clasped on her knee, slim little hands seeming too small for the heavy rings with which my lord had loaded them ; her look dropped to them now, resting on the band of gold that betokened her already a wife, yet it was not of that barrier either of them was thinking just then. For a moment the room was very still, then she raised her eyes—his were still on her face, a little quizzical, but very kindly. "Yes, I loved you," she said quietly ; "I would have been very proud to marry you, Kells ; I did not care how poor you were nor—nor for anything else." Her eyes went back to the logs and she smiled a little, though sadly as one smiles at an old sweet dream. "I shall always love you. You will always be different from other folk, but now——" she paused again, choosing her words, "now I love you as you love me, Simon, my knight."

She held out her hand and he took it in his, and for a while they sat silent ; the soft light of the candles flickered over the room and illumined the stern face of old Simon Kelston looking down upon the pair ; but whether that face betokened approval or sorrow, it would have been impossible to say.

And presently, because she had ridden far and was weary, he led her to her apartment made ready by Euphan's care, the four-post bed aired and warmed, and a truckle bed set at its foot for Grizzie's successor to lie on—a staid, middle-aged woman this, not likely

to give her mistress anxiety on the score of her love affairs thought Simon with swift amusement, and clearly disapproving this day's adventure. At the door he kissed her hand and left her to the women.

It was little after daybreak the next morning when Sir Walter Kennedy rode into the courtyard helter-skelter and demanded admittance. Simon, coming a few minutes later from his morning swim, found him pacing the hall, for Euphan, summoned by her nephew, had peremptorily refused to have her ladyship disturbed until her master's return.

"My sister is here?" he demanded, facing Kells with blazing eyes and hands clenched at his sides. "Then I must see her at once. I got home after midnight. She does my wife a wrong, Mr Kelston. I must explain."

"Your wife!" Simon repeated slowly.

"Yes, my wife. I went to that preaching I told you of. Mr Halket was there, he denounced me; he was right I am not denying it; they would not admit me while I lived in open sin. The boy is mine, I could not put her away, we were married then; but she would not have it said for my mother's sake; natheless, I shall not have her insulted, that is truth." He looked like Ann at that moment, Simon thought, liking him better than he had ever done; nevertheless he agreed with Euphan that Ann need not be disturbed to hear this news sooner than was necessary. So soothing Walter as well as he could he led him to the garden, pouring good advice into his ear till Ann, fresh and dainty, came through the yew arch and joined them. He would have left them then but Walter's hand was on his arm, "No, no, wait."

Ann's head was high, she swept her brother a stately curtesy, but for once the boy acted with sense. Waving away ceremony he took her hand. "Ann, I need your help, you do Grizzie an injustice. She is my wife, though for all our sakes she would not have it published. You need not be hard on her for indeed it is not her fault and—I love her."

His large sad eyes sought his sister's with an appeal she had never all her life been able to resist.

"Oh, Wat, Wat, what will our mother say?" she cried, and they clung together like two bairns. Of the worse offence, that Walter had been married against law by an outed minister, neither of them as yet gave much heed; but in the end it was this decided them to the compromise of silence which, for the time at least, it was agreed to adopt. For Walter would not hear of Ann's timid suggestion that he should be remarried by the curate. As for Grizzel, he owned with a sigh that she cared not a bodle whether she was married at all or what folk thought.

"But oh, Ann, the bairn is bonny, his eyes are like yours and he has his mother's gold hair; he knows me fine and holds out his arms and laughs when he sees me. I could not wrong his mother."

And Ann, a childless wife, with but that little grave in Glenample kirkyard to remind her of the babe she never knew, gave in and promised to do her best to put matters right with their mother when the time came.

CHAPTER XV

My lord returned for Christmas leaving Duke Hamilton still in London. The King had admitted them to an audience but had treated them with coldness; he would hear no word against his minister and had refused his Grace of Hamilton his hand to kiss, though the latter had begged it on his knees. My lord was none the better for his stay in town and the journey had tried him greatly; in the spring he had a seizure from which he never properly recovered, though he was to linger on for some months. To Ann he clung with a pathetic dependence and she seldom left him; she would sit by his bedside reading to him by the hour, her hand in his, his eyes fixed upon her with doglike devotion. She had never loved him as a husband, but now his need and de-

pendence called out the motherhood in her and she was not unhappy. Kelston rode over once and stayed a while ; he brought her news of Pulquhanity. Grizzie, he had to admit, was playing her part with skill and daring ; she had saved Sir Walter much annoyance by her dexterous handling of the curate, and the boy was a sturdy wean every one said, and bonny. Lady Kennedy, all unaware of the mine laid ready for her peace, was enjoying the mild winter in the clerical circles of Edinburgh ; she was in better health of late, Ann told Simon, which was as well, for she could never endure the strain of illness in others, and so could have ill borne the present life at Glenample.

It was in May that the mine was fired and that from an utterly unexpected quarter. The Archbishop of St Andrews was assassinated. Probably no man in the Scotland of any age has been more hated than James Sharp, Archbishop of St Andrews ; rightly or wrongly he has had many sins heaped upon his head. A minister of the Kirk, trusted by its more moderate party, he had gone to London as its agent to lay its cause before the King ; he had returned in 1661 with the highest honours its hated rival could confer upon him. He may have had plausible reasons for his change, no man is wholly bad and most men are self-deceivers ; but the men he had betrayed can hardly be blamed if ' Judas ' was the name which rose readiest to their lips when they thought on what he had done. Nor had he made himself more popular by his cringing attitude to their tyrants, nor by his unfailing severity to themselves. Nevertheless a thrill of horror ran through the land when it was known that, driving across Magus Muir with his daughter on his way to St Andrews, the Archbishop had been set upon dragged from his coach and murdered before her eyes. Only the persecuted folk, who believed that it was by his will alone that in the last fifteen years so many of their friends had suffered torture and the gallows, would have been more than human if, with that shudder of horror, had not also

gone up a prayer of thankfulness that, as Phineas and Saul had been raised up to execute judgment on the enemies of Israel, so now had their cries been heard and their persecutor cut off from his cruel deeds.

Simon heard the news about a week after its happening; it was said the assassins had made for the West Country where they were most like to find friends and safety. Kelston had known Sharp at Court in the early days, always with a certain feeling of contempt bred of the scorn he created among the men whose tool he had been, and this opinion had not been changed by his further acquaintance in Edinburgh, even before he himself suffered at his hands. He was not inclined now to waste much sympathy over his death (knowing nothing of its more tragic details, the old man's miserable prayers for mercy, his unfortunate daughter bespattered by her father's blood, and the needless butchery by which he had been despatched). What affected him more in that first hearing of the news, was the trouble it was like to bring on his own countrymen; for that vengeance, wholesale and terrible, would follow he had seen too much of those in power to doubt.

As was become a habit with him when he was troubled, Simon wandered alone to the hill country. He was fishing the Knocknarling Burn but, thinking more of the news than of his cast, caught the line in an overhanging alder; he had some difficulty in disentangling it, the more so that the bank was on this side very steep and overhung, and in his effort he slipped grazing his coat sleeve and setting up pain in his arm. Cursing his stupidity and finding by the sun that the hour was later than he supposed, he scrambled gingerly back and turned along the track which here followed the burnside. A few steps farther another track led to Kells. He had just reached it when a man, running blindly, collided with him; the fellow dodged but Simon had him by the collar.

“Halket!”

"Mr Kelston, thank God! The soldiers are after me; I am near spent."

There was no time to hesitate. "Get down that bank, it overhangs, lie close in." He himself began to run forward up the track. He had gone a bare twenty yards round the corner of the crag when he saw the soldiers, of whom there were about half a dozen. The commander and two of his men were still mounted, but the others were beating the heather and peering behind boulders; evidently they had missed their man about here and were at a loss.

Simon shouted and ran forward waving his arm in the direction of the moor. A soldier raised his pistol, but the officer, recognising this was not their victim, stayed him. Simon appeared much out of breath, his frayed sleeve gave him a ruffled look.

"Are you after the fanatic?" he called.

"Yes, have you seen him?" asked the officer haughtily.

"Did I see him!" Kelston rubbed his right elbow. "I saw and felt. I would have stopped him but he tripped me up; as you perceive, sir, I have but one hand."

The officer, a handsome man with an impassive manner, regarded him a trifle contemptuously. "Which way did he go?"

"Over yonder across the moor, he is making for the pilgrims' road, I doubt not; it is the quickest way down to the ford. You know it doubtless, but if not, if you will give me a horse I can show you. I am Kells, my house is down yonder, at your service."

The officer gave an order to two of his men, then addressing Kelston with more civility, "My name is Graham of Claverhouse, I am Sheriff-Depute. This fellow is one of their preachers; there is word of a conventicle northwards."

"He will be making for the Ken ford then; but I waste your time; you will catch him at Craigshinnie Lane if you keep that path. If you do not find him come back to Kells. I can give you a better supper than you'll get at the Auld Clachan."

Claverhouse thanked him and rode after his men; Simon, having rescued his rod, went home to prepare for his guests. "There is always your old abode in the byre," he remarked to the alder tree as he passed it.

Claverhouse, as Kelston had expected, returned two hours later; he had not found his man, was sulky and inclined to be suspicious, but a bottle of Kells' excellent claret restored his good temper. They had mutual friends he found; Dalyell of course he knew, and Telfer, though he was a little condescending in his attitude to the latter. Captain Telfer was too fastidious, he thought, to make a good soldier, "a man should obey orders and ask no questions."

"For conscience' sake," murmured Simon, and the other looked at him frowningly suspecting laughter that he did not quite understand; but Simon's smile was as ever disarming and he agreed. He had got his troop in September and was already Sheriff-Depute, he was proud of the promotion and intended to get higher; though he showed some compunction over his first duty, the pulling down of a meeting house erected near the Nith and winked at by the magistrates. "So perished the charity of many ladies," was his comment when narrating the act.

Simon had met many climbers at Court but seldom one more quietly determined than this young man; he had to remind himself that it was easy for one who had never had to fight for his place to be critical. Claverhouse had been long a mercenary in foreign service and here they were on safer ground, for Simon knew many of the places and people he named though there had been changes since his day. This young gentleman with his handsome face and slight air of patronage made him feel tired and old; he was not sorry when Claverhouse betook himself to bed, and less so when he and his troop rode off in the morning. Meanwhile Halket, shaved, fed, reclothed, and with money in his pocket, was making his way West to join in the great conventicle at Strathavon.

"We have put our heads well within the law this

time, Davie," Simon said to his henchman as they fished Kells burn next day after the soldiers were gone.

"Deed aye, ye daurna say guid-night tae yer ain mither nowadays unless she attends the curates," David answered with heavy sarcasm. "I never had much opinion of Mr Halket," he added after a pause, "but I will say he put up a bonny prayer in the barn when I took him his claes."

May ended and June began, a June full of rumours and foreboding; then like wildfire, the news of open rebellion. On the 29th of May, the anniversary of the Restoration and always a day of trouble even to moderate Presbyterians, a party of eighty men had ridden into Rutherglen and publicly burned the Acts of the Government which had overthrown Church and Covenants. From such a defiance there could be no turning back; the party had kept together therefore under arms and a few days later, after the conventicle at Loudon Hill, had put to rout the King's forces at Drumclog.

Kelston, strongly disapproving the action of the extremists, was yet scornful of the panic which would have made it into a great conspiracy. He and Mr Cant between them had managed to keep Kells clear of trouble, though Mr Cant had himself been fined as long ago as '73 for not keeping this same anniversary, holding it sinful to accord to the King what they did not even accord to Christ, the keeping of a holy day. Now Simon found on enquiry that two or three of the younger men had slipped away to join the insurgents. Then one afternoon, when the clouds hung white and fleecy in the blue of the sky and the air was full of the singing of birds and the whole world seemed slumberous and at peace, a messenger came riding to Kells House, hot and weary, his horse's sides flecked with foam and his whole appearance that of one who had ridden for life; it was young Adam M'Feterick, Lady Glenample's favourite groom, and a Kells man to boot. He bore a line for Mr Kelston with her ladyship's seal attached.

‘You bade me trust to your aid. I am in sore need. Adam will tell you what I dare not write. Ann.’

Simon led the young man to his own apartment, bade David bring him food and wine, for he had ridden night and day and could scarce hold himself erect. When he was fed and rested a little he poured out his story; her ladyship had trusted him fully, for there was no other way. Sir Walter had joined the rebels; he had sent his sister exultant word of the doings at Rutherglen and the victory of Drumclog. They had been at a conventicle and having word of the troopers had decided to resist; the women and children had been placed on the hillside for safety and the men had taken their station behind a wall and bog at its foot; the troopers had come upon them unexpectedly and had been easily routed; the Laird of Claverhouse had his horse ripped open and was near taken prisoner. “But oh, sir, this will be the end of Sir Walter,” said M’Feterick; “the Government has been pretty lenient to him, keeping one eye shut for her old ladyship’s sake, she being greatly thought of by the clergy, but they cannot overlook this when it comes to their ears; the managers are taking strong measures, and it can only end one way.”

Simon nodded agreement. His mind was working rapidly; below in the garden a yellow yorlin’ repeated its plaintive song with irritating persistency. “Has her ladyship any plan or may I act as I think best?”

“She leaves everything to you sir. My lord had another seizure on his hearing of the rebellion and she dare not leave him.”

“Sir Walter must be got abroad,” said Simon.

“There is a cousin of my own, M’Whan by name, who trades with Ireland from Ballantrae, he has a boat——” The young fellow hesitated, but Simon approved; “Yes, if you can trust him. From Ireland he could get abroad later.”

“I can trust him well enough, he is a Presbyterian himself and a very decent body.” He took a bag from

his pouch and set it on the table. "There is good gold should help too," he said shrewdly; "her ladyship sent it to you."

Leaving the man to rest Simon went down to Pulquhanity. He found Grizzie white-faced and anxious; she knew little but feared greatly. "I tried to keep him but it is yon devil Hamilton," she said bitterly. "Religious? Oh yes, he is religious enough, I dare say, but it's the wrong sort of religion. He has a kind of spell on Sir Walter, would have put him against me and the bairn if he could—should not be yoked to an unbeliever, and such like. I would be sorry to believe in his God any gait," she burst out, and then checking her wrath listened patiently and understandingly to Simon's commands. She must take what money and valuables were portable and clothes for herself and Walter, plain ones if she had any, he ordered, noting her silken gown. These she must have at the cross-roads that night for M'Feterick, but first she must get a suit and clean things of Sir Walter's for Simon to take with him, something as different as possible from what he had been wearing when he went away. In the morning M'Feterick would come to the house with a message from her ladyship in Sir Walter's name; his lordship was ill and she was to join him at Glenample bringing the boy. He would bring a horse and she must ride with him; they would start as if for Glenample but would go in reality to Ballantrae, where she would wait at the house of Adam M'Whan, a sea-captain, until Sir Walter came.

"And you?"

"I am going to see if my powers of persuasion are not as great as Hamilton's," he said with a smile. He liked her quiet understanding; no fuss or whining at this sudden uprooting of her peaceful life. Then through the doorway where once long ago Ann had come to greet him with her arms full of flowers, Ann's nephew entered, staggering under the weight of a puppy near as big as himself.

"Walter, put down that dog and come here."

The child obeyed, principally it must be owned because the puppy was proving rather more than he could manage ; besides, he was interested in this tall stranger.

"This is a very great gentleman, Walter," Grizzie said gravely; "I would have you salute him." Again he obeyed, bringing his hand to his forehead with military precision, his face alight with pride and mischief. As he stood there the sunlight glinting on his curls, it was neither his father nor mother he resembled most but Ann, Ann with her hazel eyes and determined mouth and the dimple that came and went most adorably.

"You have a handful here, my dear," said Simon, as he stooped to kiss the baby face raised fearlessly to his. "But, God willing, we will save his father for you."

Long curling feathers of palest coral lay on a background of azure behind the purple Rhinns as Simon rode away from Kells that night. Behind him the old Tower rose gaunt and black, but from its open door light streamed out, and as he turned to look back for the last time Kelston could see the tall figure of old Euphan in the gateway.

"I mind her standing there when yer father and me rode off to join the King, and you a wee lad by her side," David said; "and God knows whom we ride to join this day," he added below his breath. But Simon said nothing, for in the shadow of the wall was the blacker shadow of a gnarled tree-stump whose trunk was fallen and whose branches were dead. They rode in view of the Rhinns (for the June night was hardly dark at all) to Carsphairn and on by the waters of Loch Doon to Dalmellington; from hence, next day, they struck eastward through the hills. At Strathavon they had news of the insurgents; seemed there was doubt and disagreement among them, the moderate men, who were in the majority, desiring as broad a basis as possible till the enemy was defeated; the hot-heads, under Hamilton,

refusing all compliance and in consequence alienating many.

"It is the old trouble of Dunbar and Worcester over again; the Kirk has not learnt her lesson yet," said David sadly.

They had to go sparingly, for what between the constant pointings of the soldiers and the late march of the insurgents fresh horses were not to be had.

On the twenty-first they heard that the Covenanters had been driven from Glasgow and had retired to Hamilton. Riding warily therefore for they had no wish to come on either party without warning, the pair, David leading an extra horse, made their way in that direction. They were riding along a hill track when Simon drew rein; before him on the pathway lay a dead man: his broken sword was still in his hand, his grey head in a pool of blood.

David dismounted and turned him over. "It is Earlston," he said. "I heard tell he had gone to join them." The man was a near neighbour, one of the most considerable lairds in the Glenkens, and it brought Walter's danger more home to them. Together they dragged the body to the shade of a tree and covered it with its cloak; it was all they could do.

'Were they too late?' was the unspoken thought in both their minds. Some distance farther on it seemed as if their question was answered. They had come to the edge of the hill, below them lay the woods of Hamilton and farther off the Vale of Clyde and the Brig of Bothwell; from where they stood, it appeared as some mighty ant-hill disturbed; everywhere men were scattered, fighting, flying, pursuing. Whatever it had been, this *mêlée* had long since ceased to be a battle.

"He is somewhere down there, David. Will you wait for me here?"

"I will not," said Gourlay, and hitched his sword forward. "Go on, Kells, if go you must, but I am coming with you."

"Thank you," said Simon; and they rode on together down the hill.

Fugitives began to pass them. "We are beaten for that we allowed the unhallowed thing in our midst," cried one who bore a wounded comrade on his shoulders. "We are beaten because we had no one to captain us but blind leaders of the blind," said another. But for the most part the stragglers were weary wounded men with death already written on their faces and no word of complaint or reproof upon their lips. None of them could give any tidings of Sir Walter save one, who had seen him hours before fighting at the Bridge under Hackston of Rathillet.

"Who commands the King's troops?" Simon asked and was told 'the Duke of Monmouth.' That was the best news he had had for 'Prince Perkin,' as Nell called him, was an old friend and could, he thought, be trusted to be lenient.

At last, behind a little wood, they came on the man they sought. He stood with his back to a tree, his hat was gone and his head bleeding, but he still put up a spirited fight against three. Simon spurred forward and drove between the soldiers; he carried only a riding-cane but his horse and his appearance of authority stayed them. "Hold," he called. "This man is wanted alive, leave him to me."

"Who are you, sir?" one of the soldiers asked, civilly enough.

"I am on his Grace of Monmouth's staff," Simon lied with easy assurance. "I have been looking for this man. Put the prisoner on that spare horse, sergeant," he said to David over his shoulder. Then as the men still hesitated, "Do you fear to lose your reward for a valuable prisoner?" he asked. "Nay, then, I would not have you disappointed; you have done well." He took a handful of gold from his pocket and gave it to the man who had first spoken. "Divide that with your fellows," he said with a good-natured arrogance that clearly impressed the soldiers, while David, having helped Walter to mount the spare horse, was making a pretence of tying his feet

below its belly. Seeing nothing further to gain and now quite unsuspecting, the soldiers saluted and went off; but the respite could be but momentary.

"Mr Kelston," said Walter in a whisper, "Oh, God! Sir, we have had an awful time, they had neither discipline nor authority. Hamilton took the command on himself and then did nothing but quarrel. They would not even send us ammunition to hold the bridge." Now that help had come he was broken. They drew into the wood for shelter; already they saw other soldiers mounting the track and beginning to beat its lower ranges.

"Look you," said Simon quickly to David, "you must take Sir Walter through that cover and gain the upper path, once there you can make hell-leather for Maybole and so for the coast. You both ride lighter than I do and maybe I can head them off and gain you some time."

"No, no," cried Walter, catching at his bridle, "I cannot let you run this risk for me;" the colour had flamed in his white cheeks and he meant what he said. Simon gave him a quick smile; there was something in the boy after all, it seemed.

"I run less risk without you than with you," he said. "'Tis David has the more dangerous post. If the troopers do not come this way I shall be at Kells before he is, and if they do I have only to put up the Monmouth bluff and get taken to the Duke; I think he will not be hard to convince that I am no rebel, but that would be more difficult to prove in your company, my dear lad. So off with you before the ports are closed. Change his clothes as soon as you get a chance, David, and—good luck to you."

David looked at his master over Walter's bent head and his blue eyes were full of the agony of a great love. Simon laid his hand for a moment on the old man's arm but neither spoke; only to Walter, still torn between doubt and belief, he said gently, "You were right, Wat; that boy of yours is a bonny bairn," and he heard the young fellow choke back a sob as he turned and led his horse out of the wood.

He was not a moment too soon; four soldiers were coming up the brae. "Here is another," cried one of them whose sword was already dripping, and they ran at him; but Simon having remounted rode to meet them unmoved.

"Surrender in the King's name," shouted the foremost.

"Do not be a fool, my man. Where are the Duke's headquarters?" Kelston demanded coolly, so coolly that the man stood still astonished. "Are you not a rebel?" asked one.

"Do I look like a Whig?" Simon demanded with feigned indignation.

"What do you want with the Duke?" asked he of the red sword, more truculent than his fellows.

"I have despatches for him from the King, and if you do not show me his headquarters speedily it will be the worse for you," thundered Kelston. This time the men were convinced and with apology turned to direct him. "We saw rebels moving in the wood," said one.

"You saw me; I lost the track, there was no one else there; you will find better hunting on the plain, I warrant."

The men laughed and conducted him back down the steep path. At the foot they directed him and he was just congratulating himself he had got rid of them when an officer and two mounted militia-men rode up.

"There is a band of base fellows yonder by the burn, fall in and we can round them up—Who the devil have you there?"

Kelston dropped his cane and his hand went to his sword; it was only a dress rapier for he had purposely come unarmed; but he knew now that he had no chance but fight. The officer was De Morgan.

"The gentleman is carrying despatches from the King," began the spokesman of Kelston's friends.

"Lies! He is the worst traitor of any of them." The hate of years rang in De Morgan's voice, and Kelston had a vision of a leering, sinister face as he

put spurs to his horse, scattering the foot-soldiers as he rode straight at his enemy. De Morgan reined back his horse, slashing at him; a shot flew past his shoulder and another knocked off his hat, grazing his head, but he had almost got clear and at least, he thought exultantly, he was leading them away from David and Walter, when a shot luckier than the others struck his horse and with a scream of pain the poor animal staggered and rolled over. Simon was thrown clear but he fell on his mutilated arm, and for a moment the pain stunned him; in the next De Morgan had ridden him down. He had a sense of being in some vast storm, thunder and bright light, and a vision of his enemy's white, triumphant face; and then some one else struck at him from behind and he sank through infinite space into darkness.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

REUBEN HALKET stumbled along the high road between Linlithgow and Corstorphine, one of a band of many hundred weary and footsore men. It was not easy to walk because he was bound to a fellow-prisoner; also a cut on his forehead had broken afresh and the blood trickled into his eyes making it difficult to see. He was faint and hungry too, for though a woman in Linlithgow, touched by their pitiful state, had offered them food a soldier had knocked the bowl from her hand and driven her off.

In Reuben's mind reigned a great sadness, not for himself and his circumstances—these seemed to him not unmerited; the Lord was testifying against the sore backsliding of His people, the quarrelling and dissension, the boasting and hardness of heart; it was the thought of these that troubled Reuben, a broken Kirk, a trampled Covenant. From Corstorphine the street was lined with people mocking and cursing. All this misery was less than they deserved seeing it but made the prospect of death more sweet; and that death was what they marched to, he had no doubt. What was that a man cried, flinging mud at them? 'Where is your God, shall He not save you?' Was it not even thus they reviled the Lord Himself? How great and pleasant was His mercy that permitted so unworthy a company to share His own reproaches! Halket did his best to shelter his fellow-prisoner, who was an elderly man and unaccustomed to walking, being a tailor to his trade.

Through the West Port and the Grassmarket—
"Where are we to dispose of this cursed multitude?"

asked an officer; to be answered, "In the inner kirkyard of the Greyfriars." There was laughter at that and some one said, "No, no, there are no burials there yet," to which another replied, "Well, we bring skeletons enough now, a sorry crew."—Up Candle-maker Row to a gate in the angle of the old wall. As Halket and his fellow reached it a cart drew up blocking their way; in it were thrown or huddled such prisoners as were too sorely wounded to walk. "The worst of those can go to Heriot's; they have made up some shelter for them there," said the sergeant at the gate. "That fellow can walk well enough though, and that." The prisoners deemed able were roughly dragged from the cart and thrust through the gate. "Here is one seems more dead than alive," said a soldier. "The better suited for a kirkyard then," laughed another. "We had instructions about him," said the sergeant in charge. "He is one of the worst of them and was to be shown no mercy; the Colonel will be fine and angry if you take him to hospital." "Some one must help to lift him then, for bad or not, he's a dead man to my thinking." It took four men to shoulder the unconscious prisoner, for he was very tall. His hat and wig were gone and his coat had been reft from him; there was a black bruise on his forehead and his head was badly gashed; but Reuben, looking at him with pity, noted that the lawn shirt was a fine one and the sleeve that hung limply as the men lifted him was frilled at the wrist with lace; suddenly he noted something more—Raising his eyes to the prisoner's grey, blood-stained face, he cried out in horror, "Sirs, sirs, here be some dire miscarriage of justice; this gentleman is no Whig; he was my master, I know him well." "If he employed such scum as you he deserves all he gets," snarled the sergeant and, as Halket still continued to protest, he struck him on the mouth, bidding him be silent for they wanted no Whig sermons there.

One privilege only was permitted the weary captives, penned thus in an open yard surrounded by

high walls but with no other shelter against wind and weather, they were at least unloosed from each other. Movement was forbidden and they were commanded to lie down where they stood, an order most were only too thankful to obey; but Halket, released, made his way cautiously from group to group until he found the man he sought.

He lay where his captors had flung him, staring, with open eyes that saw nothing, at the sky overhead; the rough handling had re-opened his wound and it was bleeding freely; that at least would cleanse it. Reuben had in his pocket (which luckily had not been rifled) some clean rags and a pot of ointment, for he had been helping with the wounded during the battle; with these he did what he could, dressing and bandaging the wounded head and trying to discover any other hurts; the prisoner moaned faintly, but that and his slow painful breathing were the only signs of life. Halket was sure now who it was and amazement filled him. He took off his coat and made a pillow and then, for the night was turning cold as June nights often do, lay down, holding him in his arms. In the morning he told himself surely this would be put right; but now his effort to get help had been answered only with a threat that if he moved again he would be clubbed into silence.

"Do you not know we have to answer for you, life for a life, if you escape? Get in from the wall and lie down, you——" thundered a soldier, and Halket dared not disobey for fear worse befell.

The weeks that followed were one long nightmare. No attempt was made to give shelter to the prisoners; their ration of one penny loaf a day barely sufficed to keep body and soul together; of water they had little and the ale which Monmouth's kindness had ordered was seldom forthcoming.

The orders to the guard had been explicit; if any prisoner escaped the sentries were to cast dice, body for body, for the fugitives, without exception; under these circumstances it was not likely they would be careless in their oversight. At night the prisoners

were herded into the centre of the field, made to lie down in lines, and if they so much as lifted a hand condign punishment followed. But if the Council was hard-hearted and the soldiers brutal, the citizens of Edinburgh, once they had recovered from their first terror of rebellion, began to soften towards the prisoners. Men might not, unless by very special permission, come near the yard but women came daily to the gate, bringing offerings of food and other comforts, and if these offerings did not always reach the captives it was not the fault of the givers.

Halket on the first morning of their imprisonment had made a further endeavour to convince their captors that in Kelston's case a foul wrong had been committed; this man, he assured them, had never been with the Covenanters, not one of their number, he was certain, but could swear that he was unknown to him. The soldiers were indifferent, but so earnest was he that at last one consented to tell the officer who had brought in the prisoners, but there the effort to rescue ended. The officer, it is true, came and stood looking down at the unconscious man, who still lay on the bare ground with only Reuben's coat as pillow and the cloak of some other kindly soul to cover him. "You are mistaken," he said. "We had special note of this man. Colonel De Morgan knew him personally; his name is not the one you give, we have it on the list as Steven Keir; the likeness, I dare say, misled you. This is a notable villain; he wounded several of De Morgan's men before he was captured." It was in vain that Halket begged that notice might be sent to the Duke of Monmouth, the Chancellor, or anyone in authority; he only succeeded in getting himself put into irons for two days as a nuisance. When the women began to come however, he went to the gate and begged a blanket and some milk. There was one young woman who came with a friend and was specially kind; she returned the following day bearing on her back a straw palliasse. Before he could get possession of this treasure Halket had to pay the soldier on guard with a gold coin

overlooked by those who had rifled Kelston's pockets. After that the girl came as often as she could and brought milk and eggs. "It is only relations who may go in," said the guard. "He is my cousin," said the young woman and the man, more good-natured than his fellows, laughed and let her be. She was an orphan, she told Reuben and lived with her uncle and aunt opposite the Cross. Her uncle was an usher at the Parliament House and a Conformist, but her parents had both been Presbyterians and she sympathised, as did her aunt, with the suffering folk. She was deeply interested too in the story Halket told her of the sick man, and promised to go to Glenample House and try to get word with her ladyship who, Halket was sure, could do something. But when a week later she again managed to visit the prisoners it was only to bring disappointing news. Glenample House was shut and a hatchment hung above the door; my lord had died on the twenty-fourth of June. Halket had tried to speak, too, to the ministers who were at times allowed access to the prisoners, but the Captain had already warned them that this was a mad fellow with a delusion, and certainly Kelston, unshaved, dirty, and a mere shadow of himself, with bound-up head and bruised body, seemed impossibly removed from that gentleman of the King's bedchamber and laird in the West Country that Halket would have them believe him to be.

In the beginning of July, by Monmouth's good graces, a bond was offered to the majority of the prisoners and accepted by many, that they would not again take up arms against his Majesty and his authority, so that the number of prisoners in the yard dropped to some three or four hundred. Halket, sitting with Simon's head upon his knee, the more easily to shelter him from the sun which this day beat relentlessly upon them, listened with sinking heart to the discussion and disputes which had arisen over this new matter for controversy; for there were many who stoutly refused to sign a bond that admitted their late undertaking as rebellion, and prevented further

vindication of their lawful rights. He thanked God humbly that as a preacher he was among those to whom it had not been offered and so escaped a temptation which might have pressed him sorely.

Simon turned his head restlessly. "I am thirsty, Dave," he said. Halket had a little water carefully hoarded for emergency; he held the mug to Simon's lips and the sick man drank it all. "You are miserly with it, Davie," he said and laughed weakly. "I suppose you are still afraid but I am quite well now. I do not believe I ever had the smallpox at all. But, oh! how will they break to her that Gloucester is dead? Just when she is coming home and it was all to be so gay. It is those damned doctors with their bleedings; you saved me from them, did you not? I wish Henry had not died." And then, "You are a skinflint with that water, Davie." He looked up at Halket with laughing eyes.

"You do not know me, sir," said Reuben. "It is not Gourlay but I, Reuben Halket." But Simon neither saw nor understood. "I want my fiddle," he said and with extraordinary strength struggled into a sitting position in Reuben's arms. "Hush, my darling, hush! I shall play your own tune." He had the imaginary violin under his cheek, and now he began to bow slowly and lovingly with his handless wrist, fingering out the air with his left hand. Halket, a fiddler himself, watched him enthralled. "'Twas a daft lad in Scotland taught it to me when I was a child but it is an old, old tune—the Queen knew it—she says they played it under the windows of her convent. Charles laughed at that: 'Not a tune for maids in a convent,' quotha. . . . If your Christian Majesty will give me leave to use my hand but once more to play at her burial. Burial? Whose burial?" His arms had dropped to his sides and he sat up very straight. "She is dead, dead." He whispered, "She died in torture, oh! my Princess!" He fell back exhausted, shaken by dry sobs. Reuben, the tears pouring down his wasted cheeks, put his arms about

him. "Oh, my dear master, my dear sir, they have driven you demented with their torturing," he cried. But quite suddenly the tense form relaxed. "Lord! I am tired," said Simon and turning his cheek, he nestled into Reuben's arm, closed his eyes and slept.

In the days that followed Simon talked much; at times he seemed almost rational, but for the most part it was evident he was far back in his boyhood. Reuben learnt much of a little playfellow, adored but never named. Yet day by day Simon's head was healing and his superb health conquering the almost insurmountable difficulties of his recovery. Nevertheless it was near the end of July before he regained entire consciousness. Reuben, worn out, had one morning slept late; the prisoners, joined in their morning exercise, were singing the 94th Psalm:

"Thine folk they break in pieces, Lord,
Thine heritage oppress."

Reuben woke with a start and found Simon's eyes fixed on him with a puzzled expression which was yet perfectly sane.

"Is that you, Halket? Where are we?" His voice was very thin and weak and his eyes had lost their unnatural brilliance.

"We are in the upper yard of the Greyfriars in Edinburgh," Halket told him. "There has been some dreadful mistake for you are here as a prisoner from Bothwell. You were sore wounded."

Simon closed his eyes, frowning as he tried to fix his unruly thoughts.

"There is an officer called Morgan who seems to have mistaken you for some one else"

"Morgan?" Then it began to come back to him. "De Morgan, of course; he rode me down. Why? Yes—yes, I remember. They have not got Sir Walter, have they?" he whispered anxiously and as Reuben hastened to reassure him, "So this is De Morgan's revenge, is it? Poor devil, he has waited a long time."

He lay quiet after that listening to the Psalm as it rose and fell in melancholy cadence ; suddenly it swelled in triumph :

“For sure the Lord will not cast off
Those that His people be,
Neither His own inheritance
Quit and forsake will He.”

“How do you come to be here ; were you with the rebels too ? ” asked the weak voice.

“I was indeed at Bothwell, but we were not rebels, Mr Kelston ; there were but few, and they very fanatical, who would not own the King’s authority in all but spiritual matters ; there were twelve hundred here at first but many have taken the bond and been set at liberty.”

Simon was not listening. “How long have we been here ? ” he asked.

“I have somewhat lost count, but it must be near on a month, I think,” said Halket.

“A month ! ”

“You are here not in your own name, remember,” Reuben said hurriedly, for the other’s tone was eloquent. “Your friends must be finding it difficult to get track of you.”

Simon said no more ; his head ached and he was terribly weak. The bread which was all Halket had to give him choked him, though he did his best to swallow it for the sake of his faithful nurse. Happily the good-natured sentry was at the gate that day when Jenny Cleland came, and he let Halket have all the milk she brought, and promised he would do the same whenever he could. By August Simon was able to sit up and even to walk a few steps with Reuben’s arm, though his leg had been injured.

On the Sabbath after the execution of the two ministers, Mr Kid and Mr King, both of whom had been at Bothwell and one a prisoner with them in Greyfriars’, Reuben preached to his fellow-prisoners. Simon did not go to the preaching, but from where he lay he could hear Halket’s sonorous voice as he read

the chapter from which he would take his text, the 25th of Exodus.

“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly of his heart ye shall take My offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen . . . and rams’ skins dyed red.” Simon heard no more. Before his eyes, conjured up by those vivid rolling words, rose a picture of Kells: the silver waters of Loch Ken, the golden brown of the bracken, the blue of the Rhinns, and the purple heather on Bennan; here and there a crimson-splashed rowan-tree or a scarlet patch of sphagnum; and against the brilliance of that background, finer than fine linen, the exquisite whiteness of the grass of Parnassus as it grew in the bog behind Kells wood. Surely there was a tabernacle fit for God Himself?

“Oh, sirs,” cried the preacher, “are ye willing-hearted? Give ye your offering from your hearts? For surely the Lord is crying on us as He cried on Israel, and He will not accept an offering that cometh not from the heart, no, though it were the gold of Ophir. What! say ye, sirs, we have nothing to offer? Neither gold nor silver, blue nor purple, scarlet nor fine linen? We be prisoners, a broken people and destitute. Say not so. Nay, for we have these things destitute though we be—the blue of the sky that we see it no more; the gold and the silver that an’ ye had freedom (and may be you could have it for the taking of a bond), gold and silver I say, sirs, ye could make again with your trade and your merchandise as ye made it aforetime; aye, the crimson of your life-blood poured out as that of the worthy Mr King and Mr Kid was poured out not a week since, when, on their hanging, their heads and arms were cut off to make a spectacle for the people. These be the offerings that maybe will be asked of us. ‘Is my heart willing?’ Sirs, that is the question each must ask himself this day, for only of such will the Lord receive for the building of His house.”

"Christ," prayed Simon Kelston, and turned his face to the earth, "must it be Kells?"

There had been several changes of guard; the Militia had taken over from the Town Guard and the regular soldiers from the Militia; this but added fresh hardship and the need to bribe over again. The soldiers, too, were rougher with the women, and Reuben was hard put to it at times to shield Jenny from their insolence without giving that offence that would have meant a refusal of permission to go near the gate at all.

Simon, sitting on an old sack (he had long since given up his mattress to one of the many other sick men), was reading North's Plutarch, which Jenny, adding to her many good offices, had smuggled in, when he saw the officer of the guard approaching. He thrust the book into his shirt, not wishing to risk its loss and rose slowly. With the Captain was De Morgan.

"This is the man you asked for, sir," said the Captain, "by no means as dead as you supposed." Simon's recovery was regarded with no little amazement by his guards and the story of it, passed on, had not lessened in the telling.

"Unfortunate for you, De Morgan," drawled the prisoner. "You would have preferred me dead—would you not—having tried three times to murder me. But I do seem damn hard to kill."

De Morgan scowled, the officer gasped, then recovering his breath, "You are insolent," said he.

"I have no desire to be so, but I should be glad to know how Captain—or is it now Colonel De Morgan?—intends to explain to General Dalyell or the Council, why he has lied about my name. It is going to be deuced awkward for you, Captain, when the General hears of it."

"What do you mean?" asked the Captain, impressed in spite of himself. But De Morgan broke in.

"The fellow is mad; he pretends his name is Kelston when it is Keir."

"You note that though I have not spoken the name

I claim Colonel De Morgan knows it; surely this matter should not be difficult to prove. You have only to take me before his Grace of Monmouth or General Dalyell, or—for I admit Colonel De Morgan may not care to face either of these gentlemen—almost any of the Council would know me.”

The calm assurance of the demand impressed the officer; he hesitated and looked at De Morgan; the latter blustered. “A likely story, an opportunity to attempt another murder most like, as the Archbishop was murdered by his fellows, if he himself was not at that sacrilege.”

“Lord! Sir, you give me credit for enormous prowess,” the prisoner murmured with a slight shrug; but De Morgan, feeling he was as usual like to be worsted, turned his back upon him hastily.

“I cannot congratulate you on the discipline among your prisoners,” Kells heard him snarl. “That fellow should be flogged for insolence.” The Captain followed him with a murmured apology. “There are some prisoners undergoing punishment over there,” he hastened to explain, pointing out a sight which he hoped might mollify his superior’s displeasure.

Simon sat down again; he had had the best of that encounter maybe, but he could not flatter himself it would end there and to bait De Morgan was not likely to improve his own situation. He half hoped the Captain might return, but De Morgan used his power and a new officer took over the command; still, that he did not return himself was something. In the meantime the reference to the Archbishop had sent Simon’s thoughts back to a resolve which had been slowly maturing. It was said that, the real murderers, having eluded capture, other victims were to be chosen from among the prisoners already taken. Halket had escaped notice when the two other ministers had suffered, but it was hardly likely he would be overlooked a second time. Simon determined to see Jenny, and for the next few days he dragged himself down to the gate. It was not easy to get speech with those who brought gifts, and it

was a relief, when at last he managed it, to find the young woman quick and capable. He was glad to note, too, that she was as interested in Reuben as he was in her. She leapt to his scheme, promising readily to do her part in it. A much more difficult business was the persuading of Halket. He was afraid of deserting his brethren and perhaps bringing further trouble upon them, for severity had certainly followed upon the few escapes that had been attempted, and at first he absolutely refused to leave Mr Kelston. It was only the belief, duly fostered by both Simon and Jenny, that, now that the former was well enough to fend for himself, Halket could be of more use to him as a free man than as a prisoner, which finally brought him to consider the attempt.

The yard or park in which the prisoners were incarcerated was, as has been said, surrounded by high walls. On the north, however, where it bordered the city burial-ground, the wall had had many vicissitudes; originally part of a defence put up in haste upon the news of Flodden, this had been superseded by a later wall bounding the yard on the south, and had been allowed to become more or less ruinous until, within recent years, it had been rebuilt and large and florid tombs were already being erected on its churchyard side. Though, therefore, still high and strong, it had many irregularities where the older wall had been incorporated and the overtopping tombs broke the skyline. Studying this wall carefully though as inconspicuously as possible, Simon had come to the conclusion that at its lowest part a man standing on the shoulders of another, the more so if that other was of uncommon height, might reach one of these irregularities, and so pulling himself to the top, descend by a pillared tomb on the other side. This then was his plan for Halket, while Jenny, bringing with her a hat, cloak, and stout cord, was to await by the lower churchyard gate where, at Reuben's signal, she would throw him the rope by the aid of which he could easily enough get over this last obstacle.

On the night decided upon therefore just before dawn, the sentry having gone his rounds and all being still, the two crept towards the appointed place. Here with Halket on his shoulders, Simon braced himself to his full height against the wall. "Now, Reuben, quick," he whispered. "I cannot quite reach it," Reuben murmured, straining to catch the projection. With a supreme effort Simon raised himself on his tip-toes and felt Reuben's weight lighten as his hands caught the desired object, and the next moment he was on the top. There was no word spoken, their farewells had been said before and Simon, waiting only an instant to be sure the other was safely over, dropped to the ground and crawled back to his place. He was astonished to find himself trembling in every limb and the sweat pouring off him, though the night was bitter cold; he had not realised that he was still so weak. Nor had he felt so desolate since once, as a little lad, he had been shut up dinnerless after a whipping at the Queen-Mother's orders, for some mischief into which Harry of Gloucester had led him leaving him to bear the consequences. The little boy had been desperately hungry—almost as hungry as he was now. He had had a hard fight to keep from weeping, only for his dour Scots pride that would not have these French lackeys see him red-eyed, and pride had had its reward; slowly and softly the key had turned and the door had opened a chink, and then a little farther, enough to admit a tiny figure, and then behind her the head of a shame-faced boy.

"Harry and I have brought you half of our supper, *mon ami*," had whispered Henriette Anne, "and Harry is sorry." Dear babe, with her silken curls and her love of making peace. The thought of her brought peace now. Simon lying on his back, watching the first shimmer of dawn beyond the wall, forgot his hunger and his aching limbs as he thought of her, and below his breath hummed that old song of love.

CHAPTER II

ANN, Lady Glenample, bent over her embroidery frame in the Dower House of Ampleford while one of her ladies read aloud from a book of devotions. Ann was not paying much heed to her stitches nor was she listening to the monotonous voice of her duenna; her thoughts were far away, tracing and retracing ground over which they had wandered almost unceasingly for months. Would there never be any news? How kind and good Cuthbert had been, giving endless time and effort to the search, the more so that in his heart she knew he believed Simon dead, buried in some nameless grave long ago. He would not say so for her sake, always cheering her with some fresh hope, always listening with patience to her own insistent belief that, impossible though it seemed, Simon was not dead. Had she been wrong? Four months—nay, it was nearing five and no word. Surely if he were alive he must have given some sign? Cuthbert had searched the lists of prisoners she knew. She had had word from Walter weeks ago, sent on the first chance of a trusty messenger. He was well; they had got safely to Bruges, where they had found the man whose name Simon had given them still there and willing to take them in. How Simon had thought of everything! Walter had got the money she had sent too, thank God! The Earl's generosity had not ceased with his death and her jointure was very handsome, so her brother need not starve until such time as he could find employment. And her mother, how wonderful her mother was; she had been disturbed, of course, at Walter's sudden departure, but the old plea of ill-health had served; she had been more than disturbed at his marriage (it had not been possible to keep that from her any longer), but though she had been angry, her anger had passed and her health had in no way suffered. Had they sheltered her needlessly all their lives? Ann asked herself in sudden bitterness.

If Simon was dead it was she, Ann herself, who had sent him to his death. Her needle dropped and she sat looking out at the dripping trees and the low curling mist of this November day.

Mistress Honeyman glanced at her over the edge of her book; certainly Lady Glenample was mourning my lord most correctly, almost, she ventured to think, looking at the small pale face with its tragic, dark-rimmed eyes, excessively. That Ann was not listening she was well aware but she read on, hoping that in time Mr Scougal's helpful words might penetrate her sorrow.

Suddenly the door opened to admit M'Feterick, who had been promoted to house-steward in her ladyship's smaller menage. Ann turned her head listlessly, then something in his face brought her to her feet.

"Sir Cuthbert Moule, m'lady. He craves leave to see your ladyship; he—he has news."

"Instantly," she said, and then. "Thank you, Honeyman, that will do for the present." Her face, pale before, was deathlike above the heavy black of her mourning as she went to meet Cuthbert who came in on M'Feterick's very heels; he was booted and spurred and the rain still dripped from his cloak as the steward hastily lifted it from his shoulders.

"We have found him—yes, yes, alive," Mistress Honeyman heard him say as with a curtsey she passed out. M'Feterick closed the door firmly so she did not hear the hastily added, "Ann—Ann, my darling," as Cuthbert put an arm about the swaying form. The countess let herself be led back to her seat. "Alive? Well?" she whispered and as he reassured her the colour began to come slowly back to her face.

Gently he went on to tell her how Halket, not daring to approach any one in the capital where the hue and cry was hot after him, had made his way to Northumberland only to find that Sir Cuthbert was in Edinburgh; whereupon he had with no small courage, returned. He went on to explain how Simon

came to be in Greyfriars' and how it was that he had been unable to trace him there.

"Seems he has had more than one encounter with De Morgan since the duel and the scoundrel took this chance of revenge. I suppose he thought Mr Kelston would die from his wounds, or be shipped out to the Plantations without coming to trial (which is what 'tis said is to be done with the prisoners who are left). We were only just in time. I went straight to see General Dalyell; he knows something of De Morgan, so was ready to listen and we had Mr Kelston out that day. De Morgan's in the Tolbooth now," added Cuthbert with no little satisfaction.

"But Simon, where is he? He was ridden down, wounded you say, a prisoner all these months; oh! how he must have suffered——" Her eyes had grown wide and her clasped hands were pressed above her heart. Cuthbert reassured her again, Simon was almost well; Gourlay was with him and he was well cared for.

"But where?" she repeated. "Why did you not bring him here? Is he at Kells?" Then as he shook his head, "You are hiding something, Cuthbert; you torture me."

He put his hand over hers which had dropped to her lap. "Nay, dear, be patient, I would have brought him if I could, but though Dalyell could rescue him from Greyfriars' he could not set him free without the Council. He is in the lodging of the Captain of the Guard at Holyrood. It will be only for a time, doubtless, but with all this preparation and hubbub over his Royal Highness's arrival, the Council will attend to no business for the moment; but he is in no discomfort. I was to reassure you at all points."

"Oh," she cried, "how stupid men are. Why must he be kept prisoner? He has done nothing."

Still gentle with her, Cuthbert explained. "He was at Bothwell you see; he must give some reason for that."

"Then he must tell them why he went," she said

with quiet determination. "Walter would not have Simon suffer for him; he will come back and stand his trial if need be." But again Cuthbert shook his head.

"No, he will not have Walter's name mentioned, he is very sure of that. If he must suffer, at least let him keep that satisfaction he bade me tell you, fearing you might have some such thought. In truth, it would not I believe help him; to rescue a—rebel is not an offence lightly dealt with. We can but wait and trust all will be well when his Royal Highness comes."

But into Ann's heart had crept a new dread, for the Duke of York was the one of all the Court who had never looked smilingly upon Mr Kelston and his fiddle.

Simon sat on a wooden settle, his injured leg comfortably stretched along it; he was reading and (O blessed luxury!) smoking. The fire blazed in the grate and David was clearing away the remains of an ample meal shaking his head over the small quantity consumed. Simon dropped his book to his knee and watched the smoke curling upwards with a little sigh of content; one must lie for months on the bare ground, wounded, starved, and helpless, really to know the joy of a good bed, clean linen, and the hundred and one attentions which Cuthbert and David vied with each other in showering upon him, he thought. Withstanding David's efforts to overfeed him seemed at the moment the worst of his troubles, the shadow of the restraint under which he still lay mattering little, for with the lassitude of convalescence upon him he had no desire to wander.

He was indeed distressed for those men with whom he had been so long herded; not only for the five hanged that week on Magus Muir for the murder of a man they had never seen, but for those others whose terrible fate, crowded together under hatches and bound for a slavery worse than death, he had so barely escaped. They had not made life easier for him, it was true, in the weeks that followed Halket's escape;

for, the more pliant having long since taken the bond, the suffering and hardship to which the rest had been exposed had but tended to stiffen and narrow them, and having discovered that Kelston habitually attended the ministrations of the indulged and suspicious of his anomalous position among them, they had been inclined to treat him with severity and allow him little of their fellowship. Yet he could not but admire their singleness of heart nor fail to note that through the apparent sternness of their creed shone the joy of a personal religion; whereby, in the words of one of them, 'the consolations of God overbalanced all.' It troubled him now in his own comparative comfort to think of their misery.

"There is a coach wi' black liveries drawing up outside and I am thinking it is my Lady Glenample," said David, putting his head round the door of the inner room. "If so be she is coming to see us you had best put your wig on, Kells; it hides yon dunt on your head and gives ye a wee thing more appearance."

Simon laughed and obeyed; he would never grow conceited with David as a mirror, he thought good-humouredly, as he pulled himself up and put out his pipe. A moment later the guard opened his door and Ann came in. Simon had a vision of the tall grim-faced maid in the passage as the man shut the door once more, leaving them together.

"Simon," she said and nothing more. He put his hand under her chin, lifted her face gently and stood looking down at it for a moment with kindly, affectionate eyes. "Poor bairn, you have had a weary time?" he asked. Her eyes filled. "Weary? We have little to complain of when we put it against your suffering. Simon, can you ever forgive me?" Cuthbert had warned her she would find him changed, but this emaciated man with his worn face and tired eyes seemed but the ghost of her hero; he moved stiffly too she noticed as he led her to the settle, he whose liveness had never failed to thrill her. Only his smile was the same, as quizzical as ever, as he repeated her words. "Forgive you! Forgive you

for keeping the one promise I ever asked of you? Child, how can you talk such nonsense?" Then he grew grave again. "It was neither your fault nor Walter's that I fell in with a man I had injured—for I do truly think I injured him more than if I had killed him, as was my first mad intent. Do you remember how you reproved me at the time? 'I think he spoke but for the sake of speaking,' you told me; if that were true I punished him hardly; no wonder he took his revenge when he could. You must not blame yourself for that."

"You are generous," she said in a low voice but he shrugged away the praise with evident dislike, demanding news of Walter and throwing in a kindly word for Grizzie. He told her, too, of Jenny Cleland's and Halket's pathetic romance. Cuthbert had promised to do all he could for Halket for Scotland would be too hot to hold him for many a day, it was to be feared. Of Cuthbert's handling of that grim old warrior, General Dalyell, and of his kindness to himself he had much to say. It was not till she had risen to take her leave that anything further was said of his own imprisonment.

"It cannot be for long; as soon as the Council meets the Duke must see to it that you are released." And then, as if she doubted her own certainty. "If not, we must manage your escape." He smiled at the well-remembered tilt of her head that boded ill for opposition, but he shook his own: "Nay, I cannot do that, I gave Dalyell my parole."

"But you can take it again."

"And find myself in irons in the Tolbooth? No, my dear, I have learnt to know comfortable quarters when I see them."

He had had some acquaintance with irons after Halket's escape and had no desire to repeat the experience, but he did not tell her that. Instead, seeing her obstinate, "To what could I escape? To exile? That is well enough for a young man with wife and child to make a home for him. I had my fill of foreign towns when I was a boy. I would not

go on my travels again." Then as she still looked troubled, "But let us not picture a flooded ford before we have to cross it." To which she readily enough agreed, though her heart was heavy.

"The Duke will soon be here," she repeated, clinging to a hope which was in truth a fear.

After she had gone Simon sat for some time longer watching the fire, his thoughts travelling back to the days of exile when James was Captain-General of the King's forces (if forces they could be called) and gaining laurels everywhere as an excellent general and fearless soldier. Simon, rather to Charles's annoyance, had greatly admired the Duke of York in those days, for his military exploits were of a nature to excite hero-worship; even in later years, when his admiration had been at times severely tested, he had always been ready to defend the Duke when Charles grew abusive over his brother's obstinacy. But that this shy regard had never been reciprocated he was well aware. James had never approved the King's familiar affection for the 'little Presbyterian', as Charles half-mockingly called the boy, and he had deeply resented his easy toleration of the youth's adoration for their sister, as also Henriette's own encouragement of it. He had considered Simon flippant, which was probably true, and presumptuous, which was not. No, Simon thought with a resigned shrug, he had nothing particular to hope from James.

CHAPTER III

JAMES, DUKE OF YORK, came to Edinburgh about the end of the year in no very happy humour. The King's illness had brought him post haste from Brussels and the dismissal of his rival, the Duke of Monmouth, had cheered him for a time; but the fiction of the Popish Plot still raged, and on the King's recovery it had been thought best that his Catholic brother should once more absent himself

from the Court. Hence this winter journey. Nor had the reception accorded him in some of the northern towns tended to raise his spirits; and though Edinburgh had received him loyally, the damp November weather and the bare, almost unfurnished rooms of Holyrood had had a depressing effect upon the young Italian Duchess which could not but react upon her husband.

Simon, from his chamber in the guard-house, could see the reflection from the bonfires and hear the shouts of the people as they welcomed the royal pair. David and Telfer brought him the gossip of the town, the former with much head-shaking; but it was not for some days that the Duke's arrival made any difference to his own quiet existence.

David's care had worked wonders with Simon's appearance; he was still very thin and walked with a limp, though he did his best to hide it; but, to quote his servant's frank description, he no longer looked as if he had 'been dug up frae the kirkyard side o' the wa', a fair rickle o' banes'. David, too, had fetched in a tailor so that his master's clothes no longer hung loosely and, in his dove-coloured suit and freshly curled wig Kelston looked as fine a gentleman as ever when at last he was called upon to appear before the Council in the Long Gallery of Holyrood.

The Chancellor presided, the new Archbishop of St Andrews on his left, and on his right, sitting low in his chair, his hat drawn down over his brows and his long face looking longer and gloomier than usual, sat James, Duke of York.

To Simon there came with painful vividness the remembrance of their last meeting. The great gallery seemed to shrink to the four bare walls of the Tennis Court dressing-room; he saw Charles, red-eyed and distracted, and James kneeling in the far corner, his white face raised to heaven as he muttered prayers for the dead; and on his brain with hammers of fire Arlington's broken tones branded once again the words of that fatal letter, 'and she continued in the greatest torture imaginable.' For a

moment the room reeled and he felt sick and faint, in the next he had command of himself. But James too had remembered; Simon saw his eyelids flicker as after one swift upward glance he dropped them, to sit seemingly absorbed in the study of his own tapered fingers.

There were some half-dozen noblemen present also Mackenzie the King's Advocate, and the Bishop of Edinburgh; but not, as Simon noted with regret, Dalryell.

"It is with sorrow, Mr Kelston, that we see a gentleman of your position, and one whom his Most Sacred Majesty has always treated with such consideration and affection, brought before us, not for the first time, indicted with crimes against his Majesty." Rothes paused and looked at Simon.

"It would be a matter for sorrow, my lord, if the indictment were true, but on the former occasion your lordship may remember that nothing in the nature of a crime against his Majesty was proved, the whole matter being passed over by his Majesty's Commissioner as unworthy even of trial; while, on the present occasion, I have yet to learn for what crime I have already suffered five months' imprisonment under a false name and at the instigation of a personal enemy."

The King's Advocate was on his feet, leaning over the table and regarding the prisoner with an expression from which any sign of previous friendliness was studiously banished.

"The very fact that his Majesty had, through his Commissioner, been pleased graciously to overlook and pardon your last misdemeanour might have been supposed a reason for your refraining from appearing with the rebel army at Bothwell, Mr Kelston. Instead of which, so hardened and callous is your conduct, that on the twenty-third of June of this year you are met there by three soldiers to whom you pretend you are carrying despatches to his Grace of Buccleuch and Monmouth, upon which plea you would have made to escape from them had they not at that moment

been joined by an officer who recognised you ; where-upon you at once rode at him with drawn sword and with intent to slay him, had not one of the soldiers fired at and killed your horse whereby you were happily cast down, overpowered, and disarmed. Furthermore (as if this were not in itself sufficient to prove your treasonable intent) you did, while a prisoner in the upper or south Greyfriars' yard, aid and abet a fellow-prisoner (and one who, by reason of being a fanatic preacher, was the more deserving of punishment) to escape. Nor is this all, for as far back as 1672 you resetted an outed minister justly pursued for his refusal to conform to the Conventicle Act of 1670 ; and having carried him to your own house, kept him there in hiding until his death, refusing to allow his Majesty's troops to prosecute their duty by searching your house and apprehending the aforesaid minister ; even going to the length of wounding and mutilating their officer by brutally attacking him with a sword and severing a finger from his right hand."

The Advocate paused, and at the same moment the Duke raised his eyes, letting them rest an instant in puzzled question upon the prisoner's right arm. The Archbishop also regarded Kelston with evident astonishment ; but before he could frame the question which hovered on his lips the Advocate had begun again.

"Lastly you have not only refused to assist his Majesty's Government by furnishing information or in any way helping the Commissioners appointed to secure obedience to the bond, but you have yourself refused to sign or bind yourself by the aforesaid bond. Of the said crimes above mentioned you are herewith indicted."

"And these crimes are ? "

"Rebellion, resetting and abetting the King's enemies, and refusal of the bond," muttered the Chancellor uncomfortably.

Kelston had drawn himself up, now his eyes, honest, humorous, faintly puzzled, passed from face

to face as if he would ask his Judges to share with him the absurdity of these accusations.

"Your Royal Highness, my Lords, is it possible that any among you who know me, and some of you have known me many years, do seriously believe that I could either by word or deed do aught in disloyalty or against the interests of the King—my master?"

Argyle shook his head in open agreement and Rothes' eyes wavered and fell, but the Duke sat with immobile face refusing to meet the eyes that rested on him with a touch of pleading in their pride. The Advocate broke in sternly, "There is no question, Mr Kelston, of what any here believe or disbelieve; you are accused of certain crimes and it is for you, if you can, to prove these accusations false."

"Ah—I see." Kelston's eyes left the Duke's face and rose to where through the long window he could see the blue sky above the Abbey roof; he knew now that he was fighting for his life and he was vaguely troubled to find himself careless of the issue. The lassitude from which he had suffered of late was falling upon him once more, life and death seemed matters of small import. With an effort he shook off his fatigue and began his defence.

As to the accusation of rebellion, he had not, he submitted respectfully, ever been at Bothwell or in arms against the King's forces. He had gone to Hamilton on private business and was not even aware that a battle was taking place until he found himself among fleeing and pursuing men.

"Are you ready to swear that your business had nothing to do with the rebellion?" demanded the Advocate.

"I am ready to swear that it was in no way derogatory to his Majesty's interests." Finding himself attacked by soldiers he had desired to be taken to the Duke's headquarters; he was unarmed save for his ordinary dress sword which he had not drawn until he was obliged to do so in self-defence. He went on to tell them of how he had been attacked, ridden down,

and while unconscious, sent as a prisoner to Greyfriars' under a false name. If he was the rebel that the King's Advocate would make him, why, he demanded, had not De Morgan registered him under his own name ?

"Perhaps he found it difficult to believe that one who had had so many favours from the King as Mr Kelston should rise in arms against him," suggested the Bishop of Edinburgh.

"Your lordship is right. It was so unbelievable that he thought it safer for his purpose to perjure himself under the expectation that I would not live to refute him ; an expectation nearly fulfilled, had it not been that one of my fellow-prisoners knew and nursed me with uncommon devotion. It was this same gentleman whom, as I could not make good my escape, I assisted, on the understanding (faithfully carried out on his part) that, once free, he would inform my friends of my predicament, and they, bringing word of it to General Dalryell—a gentleman," he added with a flash of his old impish humour, "rebels do not as a rule seek to embrace—he, having no doubt as to my innocence, ordered my release. In my own defence, my lords, I would point out that the accommodation your lordships had provided in Greyfriars' was not so luxurious that a wounded man might not be excused for using any means in his power to remove himself to less airy quarters."

In dealing with his resetting of Mr Weston, the Archbishop asked sharply if he had known him to be a forfeited and outlawed minister.

"I knew he was an old man and a dying one, your Grace."

"That is not an answer to my question, Mr Kelston."

Simon shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish me to accuse myself I admit that I was aware Mr Weston was without the law ; but it did not seem to me that in the circumstances that was of much importance ; the man was dying."

"I very much fear," interrupted the Advocate, "that your business at Hamilton was of a like nature,

the assisting of the King's enemies. Are you sure, Mr Kelston, that this was not the case ? ”

“ I have already stated that my business was not against his Majesty's interest ; if you do not believe me, my lord, it is your business, not mine, to prove it otherwise.”

“ You refuse to make further statement anent your reasons for going to Hamilton ? ” Mr Kelston bowed ; whereupon Sir George leaned across the table and spoke in a low threatening voice. “ Perhaps you are not aware, Mr Kelston, that there are means by which the unwilling can be assisted to give information.”

Kelston's brows rose. “ If your lordship refers to torture,” he said in his cool level voice, “ I have still one whole leg and a hand to offer you.” But at that the Chancellor, who thought the matter was going too far, asked suddenly if Mr Kelston was willing to own the Archbishop's murder as murder, this being a test and stumbling-block to the true fanatic. He asked it now half in jest and Simon answered readily that he had no difficulty in admitting it. But because there came to him the remembrance of the men who had been done to death, though they had had no more to do with the murder than he had, simply because they were not clear to admit it as unlawful, he hesitated for a moment over the hastily added question of the Bishop, “ And you condemn the bloody and barbarous murderers ? ”

In that moment Simon realised that the Duke was looking at him at last ; something in the expression of the cold narrowed eyes drew his attention. The Bishop repeated his question with some emphasis, and with a slight start Simon brought his thoughts back to it.

“ I think all murder is to be condemned, my lord, even if judicial ; and it is certain these men believed themselves, and are believed by many innocent people, to be avengers of public wrong rather than of private spite.”

“ Mr Kelston ” said the Duke of York, speaking for

the first time, "may perchance hesitate to condemn any person who presumes to take upon himself the office of an avenger of blood—unless mayhap, the loss of his hand has changed his opinions?"

There was an instant of silence, all eyes were fixed on the Duke more or less questioningly.

"Your Royal Highness speaks truly," Kelston said quietly; "God knows I of all men lack the right to condemn my fellows."

Simon sat in the common jail of the Tolbooth. His interrogation before the Council had ended abruptly on his apparent refusal to condemn the Archbishop's assassins and he had been remanded to the justiciary for trial; and bail though Sir Cuthbert Moule had offered any sum that was desired had been refused. But four months in Greyfriars had hardened Simon to discomfort, and there had grown up in him a sympathy for common folk that made their company, even the company of rogues and fanatics, far less of a trial to him than it would have been to most men of his rank. David, who had refused to be parted from his master, shared his imprisonment and guarded him from untoward annoyances. Sir Cuthbert had just left him. Poor Cuthbert! Simon's heart warmed at the thought of all he had done and desired to do. He wished he had not had to ban the scheme his friend had that day come to propose, a scheme of Ann's devising he was certain, yet he was glad that he had been firm in his refusal. He could not allow an appeal to the King. Charles would have saved him of a certainty he told himself sharply, but—why deceive himself? He would rather die in that belief than risk having it taken from him. Charles was standing firm for James and the succession. Simon was proud of that for from all accounts it would have been easier to bend and vastly more popular; the less then could the King afford to run counter to public opinion in smaller things. That the priests who were being daily sacrificed in London to Protestant zeal were as innocent of treason as he was himself Simon opined

sadly. Charles must know that, yet he lifted no hand—no, he would not think of that. Then unbidden and undesired rose the quick thought that King Louis, who could not approve this murder of Catholics, might be appeased by his own, for that Louis had neither forgotten nor forgiven he guessed from James's bitter comment. Well, if he could serve Charles by dying he would die the more willingly, and at least he would not embarrass him by any appeal.

There was a disturbance in the Iron House where the worst criminals were imprisoned ; but disturbances there were common enough and Kelston, deep in his own thoughts, took no note of this one until he heard David's voice raised in angry complaint. "Keep hau'd of her, ye fools," and looking up he found a tall old hag gazing down at him with fierce brooding eyes ; she was heavily manacled and two jailers were dragging her out, though whether to trial or execution he did not know. She had broken from them hurling them to the ground with mad strength, and David, never very far from his master, she had pushed aside as one might push a child.

"What did ye with my slave ? " she asked, and then shrinking back from his grave pitying look she began to chant in hoarse monotonous tones :

"Ye have served kings and do serve them.
Ye have dared where kings dared not,
And love where they loved ;
Ye have withstood me who am a Queen of Egypt ;
But ye shall walk higher than we walk.
In the heaven of heavens."

She laughed a shrill mad laugh and suddenly fell on her knees before Kelston. "Pray for me and such as me when you come into your kingdom." The jailers seized her and dragged her to her feet, and then, struggling and cursing, to the door. "I am accurst, accurst ! " she cried as they bore her off. An awed silence fell upon the rest of the prisoners. "If she be a witch she is accurst indeed," said a man who

had been at Bothwell; "they do right to put her to death according to the Scriptures."

"God pity her nevertheless," Simon answered him. He remembered the woman now; it was she who had so nearly murdered Grizzie in the back lane of Campbell's. Then her strange words came back to him. 'Dared what kings had not dared, love where kings had loved.' A sudden dread fell upon him. Would she whom he loved have understood, or did she far off beyond the starry heavens think as did her brothers? For the first time in his life doubt of her crept into his heart and in that moment he knew a bitterness worse than death. . . .

In a far corner a woman began to sing; she had a clear, sweet voice and even the rougher sort among the prisoners, subdued as they already were by the mad woman's ravings, hushed their brawling to listen.

"Save me, O God, because the floods
do so environ me,
That ev'n unto my very soul
come in the waters be.
I downward in deep mire do sink,
where standing there is none:
I am unto deep waters come
where floods have o'er me gone."

Through the high unglazed window a clean wind blew from the north.

"Lord, Thou my folly know'st, my sins
not cover'd are from Thee,
Let none that wait on Thee be shamed,
Lord God of Hosts, for me."

It seemed to Simon as if in that gloomy place a Hand closed upon his bringing strength and sanity; he could face his fears and shame them. Rising, he went across the hall to where were gathered around the singer a little group of prisoners who, like herself, were there for conscience' sake; they were singing a new psalm now and they had forgotten for the moment that life was hard and the future uncertain,

and Kelston, leaning against a pillar, forgot it too as he listened.

“He took me from a fearful pit,
and from the miry clay,
And on a rock he set my feet,
establishing my way.”

CHAPTER IV

ANN knelt by her high window looking out over the chimney-stacks as she had looked that winter day ten years before. Ten years? Was it only ten years? It seemed a lifetime when she thought of all that had happened. Yet, as turning from the window she caught sight of herself in the mirror that hung over the fireplace, she seemed for an instant to be looking still at that girl of ten years ago; only now the girl wore black weeds instead of a sprigged gown, and her face was thin and weary with shadows below the hazel eyes; aye, and Walter, who should have been coming through the half-open door, was an exile finding it hard enough in Holland to support a wife and child.

“Yet I look but a chit still,” she thought contemptuously, brushing back her unruly curls; and then, “no wonder he would never treat me as aught but a child!”

O God! What news would Cuthbert bring to-day, and when would he come? It was already late. She pressed her clasped hands above her heart to still its beating that she might hear the first sound of his coming, though dreading to hear it.

She had come to her mother's house for that she must be at hand though her mourning still forbade her going to Court or attending at public places. She would have thrown convention to the winds and gone to Simon's trial for all that, if he had not sent her gentle command against it. She and Cuthbert had done all they could; Sir George Lockhart was to defend him; there was no better lawyer in the kingdom

'twas said unless it was the King's Advocate himself. Cuthbert owned Mackenzie was terrible in prosecution, he could twist the most innocent things into treason and he had gathered witnesses amany to prove his case. Macpherson the curate had been called to give an account of what he had seen when Mr Weston had been brought to Kells; he had not stopped at that, neither, but had gone on to show how Kells House had become a refuge for the guilty. Two women who had been turned out of lodgings at Dumfries for nonconformity had found shelter there, and the farmer at Garryford, when the curate had appealed to Mr. Kelston against him, had received, instead of punishment, a farm on Kells estate. Halket's record had been examined with its revelation that for years Mr Kelston had employed a secretary who was recusant. Sir George had made much of this; and on the second day of the trial had produced a new and even more formidable witness, the laird of Claverhouse, who in turn told of how he had nearly captured this same Mr Halket but had been put off the scent by Mr Kelston, who had, he now saw, lied to him, pretending knowledge of the man and directing him wrongly so that Halket had had time to escape. To Lockhart's annoyance Kelston had made no attempt to deny this damning piece of evidence, merely apologising good-humouredly for the trouble he had given to Captain Graham; but adding that he was sure he would have done likewise had the life of a friend and old servant been involved. But the Advocate's most skilfully played card had been Kelston's apparent refusal to condemn the Archbishop's assassins. "If condemnation be refused against the murderers it is clearly proven that the murder itself is approved."

Cuthbert at least had not treated Ann as a child; he had not attempted to hide that Simon's case was desperate; perhaps had he had any hope himself he might have buoyed her up, but as it was, it was clearly better for her to be prepared. And to-day judgment would be given.

Surely, surely, if Simon had permitted an appeal, the King must have interfered to save him? Yet her heart misgave her. Was that a closing door? O God, have mercy!

"Sir Cuthbert Moule, m'lady," said the old steward and Ann, unconsciously clutching the high chair-back, waited, unable to move, as the young man crossed quickly to her side. No words were needed; with grave tenderness he took her hands and led her to a couch. Then seated beside her, his arm about her, he laid on her knee a little leather case. He was afraid for her, but now that it had come Ann was dry-eyed and calm.

"Can nothing be done to save him?" But to that he could only shake his head—he had done everything he could. He had seen Dalyell, but the old General believed he had been fooled over Mr Weston and was furious. He had interviewed the Chancellor, who was ready enough to agree that the prisoner was less guilty than the evidence made out, "But, Lord! Sir Cuthbert, we cannot go against the law." One thing only he could and did promise, though Cuthbert did not speak of this now. Save for death the sentence would be commuted; they could have Kelston's body to bury decently at Kells and they wished it. The Bishops had been even less approachable; they, Cuthbert owned, probably believed the verdict just. Touching the packet on her knee he told her, "Mr Kelston sent you this with his love; you have, he says, kept it for him before, and now you will keep it for his sake—and hers."

"But when?" she hesitated, unable to form the question; but understanding he answered it with the same grave gentleness, "To-morrow." She was on her feet, the miniature clasped to her heart, her eyes wide with horror. "To-morrow? It cannot be! They must give us time for appeal. The Duke——"

"The Duke left town two days ago; the Bishops are fearful lest Christmastide be bloodstained, 'twas they hurried it, I think." He spoke bitterly, but added with quick change of tone, "But indeed,

seeing it must be, why delay? He has no fear. I spoke with him for a moment, truly I think he is glad. They have allowed him privacy to-night, Mr Cant is with him."

Then the truth came upon her and with a cry she took a tottering step, blind hands held out as if she would push from her this awful thing. "Cuthbert, Cuthbert—I love him." Cuthbert drew her to his breast, strong arms about her tenderly. "I know it, dear heart," he whispered; "I would have saved him, died for him, if I could."

The usual eager crowd thronged about the Mercat Cross where the scaffold was erected. The day was gloriously fine with the sun beating down on all, and far down the street beyond the Netherbow Port a gleam of blue sea was visible—such a day as comes at times in a northern winter, clear and warm. The crowd congratulated itself; it had not been so fine a day when the two ministers had suffered though that had been mid-August. This man had been in the King's household 'twas said, the more deserving of his fate then, that he should have proved rebel to so good a master. So said some, but there were others ready to shake their heads and wonder if this did not prove what they themselves had suspected; if the King's own servants turned against him and they good Protestant folk, why surely——? Voices dropped and eye met eye uncertainly, such words as "Jesuit" and "Papist" were breathed rather than spoken. Those nearest the speakers edged off to safer quarters and the soldiers pressed back the crowd. Inside Parliament Close behind the guards it was quiet enough.

Cuthbert had bribed an officer and got entry to the Laigh Council House; here Ann could have more privacy for her farewell than in the street. Leaving Mistress Honeyman and M'Feterick in the close he took her within, watching her with anxious care. The long arched chamber was gloomy even on such a day of sunshine, and coming from the light Ann could for a moment distinguish nothing, then with a

start she realised that Simon was already there. He had been brought over from the Tolbooth a few minutes before and stood between Telfer and Mr Cant while the youngest of the Bailies addressed to him a few admonitory remarks. The Bailie was a short and stout person, rather nervous and flustered, but the prisoner's head was courteously inclined, and his eyes bent on the red face showed no resentment if little interest. Telfer beside him was vastly more troubled, glaring at the magistrate distastefully.

"Sir, you are condemned to die by the sentence of the Justice Court for your resetting of rebels and other treasons and we are here to put the sentence into execution. It is time for you to consider what you have been doing, for your time is short and——" Here Telfer shifted from one foot to the other and the Bailie stumbled in his speech—"the Scripture saith the sin of rebellion is as that of witchcraft," he ended trying to regain his dignity.

"That were a serious sin to consider, sir, if one were in truth guilty of it," Kelston answered him quietly, then raising his eyes he saw Ann and his face lighted. "Have I permission to speak with my friends?" he asked; the Bailie, now thoroughly unnerved by Telfer's frown, hastily acquiesced.

Kelston crossed to Ann's side and took her hand, smiling down at her; in spite of his limp there was something of the old eager liveness in his step; he was glad for her sake that, perhaps because of his position in the King's household, perhaps because few of the Council really believed him guilty, he had been allowed a privilege usually reserved for peers and was unbound.

"So you have come to bid me God speed. That is like you," he said and the pleasure in his voice repaid her for all her shrinking dread. The strong, lean fingers clasping hers had, she felt, no tremor and his eyes were as kindly and untroubled as ever. "Yes, that is like you," he repeated, "but——?" She saw sudden concern for herself cross his face and his look passed from her to Cuthbert anxiously; over her head the

eyes of the two men met in question and answer and Simon's face cleared again. "But—of course, Cuthbert will take care of you now, and always I trust. You will keep my miniature, for her sake and mine? And I would ask something more of you," his voice dropped a little. "David, he is old to seek new service and I can do nothing being forfeited, but you, I know, will not let him starve."

"If David can forgive me," Ann said, with a catch in her voice. "Simon, if I had never asked your help this would not have happened."

He shook his head. "No, this was decided long ago in France; it was only a question of time, I think. That you have allowed me to serve you once has been my great pleasure; and now you are in such good hands I can leave you with an easy mind. Yet I should be saddened to carry with me the thought that you blamed yourself, for I would have you remember me with merriment and good feeling and that you cannot do if you wrongfully hold yourself responsible."

She raised her white face and smiled at him bravely. "I shall try to do as you wish, Kells," she said, and at that he smiled again and stooping kissed her cheek. "Thank you." ("Child," she whispered). "Child," he repeated tenderly, "God bless you." and then, "Good-bye, lad," and with a quick pressure of Cuthbert's hand he had passed to take his place in the already forming procession.

On the scaffold Mr Kelston was asked if he would speak to the people; from where she waited with Cuthbert in the enclosure of soldiers that kept back the crowd Ann could see him hesitate, shaking his head, then as others pressed him he shrugged his shoulders stepped to the edge of the scaffold and stood looking at the sea of upturned faces. Then he began to speak and for the last time Ann heard that little roll of his R's which had always had power to thrill her.

"I understand that it is customary for a man in my position to address you, gentlemen, yet I have

little to say. I am come here to-day to die because—on my honour, I do not know why—unless it be that, having experienced the temptation to vengeance, I cannot find it in my heart to judge those who have fallen to it.” He paused and added more gravely, “Yet I would not have you think I approve murder, under whatever cloak it would disguise itself. As to treason against the King, I hold myself guiltless of that, seeing I have known and loved his Majesty longer and better than most of those men who have condemned me; though, may be for that very reason, I do own there be matters in which even the King may not rule my conscience, yet I can and do say from my heart, God save the King.”

He took off his hat as he said it, standing very tall and straight with just the shadow of a smile at the corners of his lips. There was a murmur from the crowd, this was not the sort of speech they had learnt to expect from a ‘martyr.’ But Simon had ceased to notice the people, his eyes had travelled down the long sloping street to the glimmer of sea beyond, and his thoughts had gone farther still to the days of his own childhood when the King was but a tall lanky boy already losing the realities in the wild chase after shadows. “Poor Charles,” said the man who was to die as a traitor, and his voice was very kindly.

Then he turned and at Mr Cant’s direction knelt, while the minister prayed earnestly, and still kneeling he answered the solemn question: “Sir, do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” “I do,” said Simon Kelston. “And furthermore, sir, believe ye that He can save you to the uttermost?” There was a pause as if the kneeling man repeated the question to himself, then raising his clear eyes he answered unhesitatingly, “Yes, I thank God I do believe that too.”

And Ann’s heart leapt, for she knew that Simon who could lie so glibly for a friend would never lie in this.

“He can, He does, oh, my dear lad, hold hard to that,” Mr Cant said brokenly, and raising his hand he

blessed the dying man and afterwards taking him in his arms embraced him. Then Simon rose and giving his hat to David spoke some word of farewell; the old man knelt and kissed his hand and his master laid it affectionately on his heaving shoulder. "Why, Davie man, this is not such a bad way to get off the stage; there were times when you feared a worse for me!"

The executioner offered him a cap but he refused it with a smile, and the next instant had swung himself up the ladder as a man might go to his bridal.

An expectant hush had fallen on the crowd; there was it seemed to Ann no sound in all the world as the man upon the ladder prayed silently. Then he turned his face for the last time to the blue sky and suddenly there came from him a cry surprised, exultant, as after long absence a friend may greet a friend.

"Anne!" cried Simon Kelston, and throwing out his arms before the executioner could touch him he had cast himself from the ladder. At the same moment from some high window there floated out upon the breathless air the plaintive notes of a violin interpreting a strange old tune.

Cuthbert's hand had covered Ann's eyes on the instant, hiding her face upon his breast. "'Twas your name he called at the last," he whispered presently as he led her away; but Ann shook her head. Once in an old-world garden she had heard that call before, and to her anguished heart came peace, for surely she, to whom his boy heart had been given long ago had come for Simon now.

